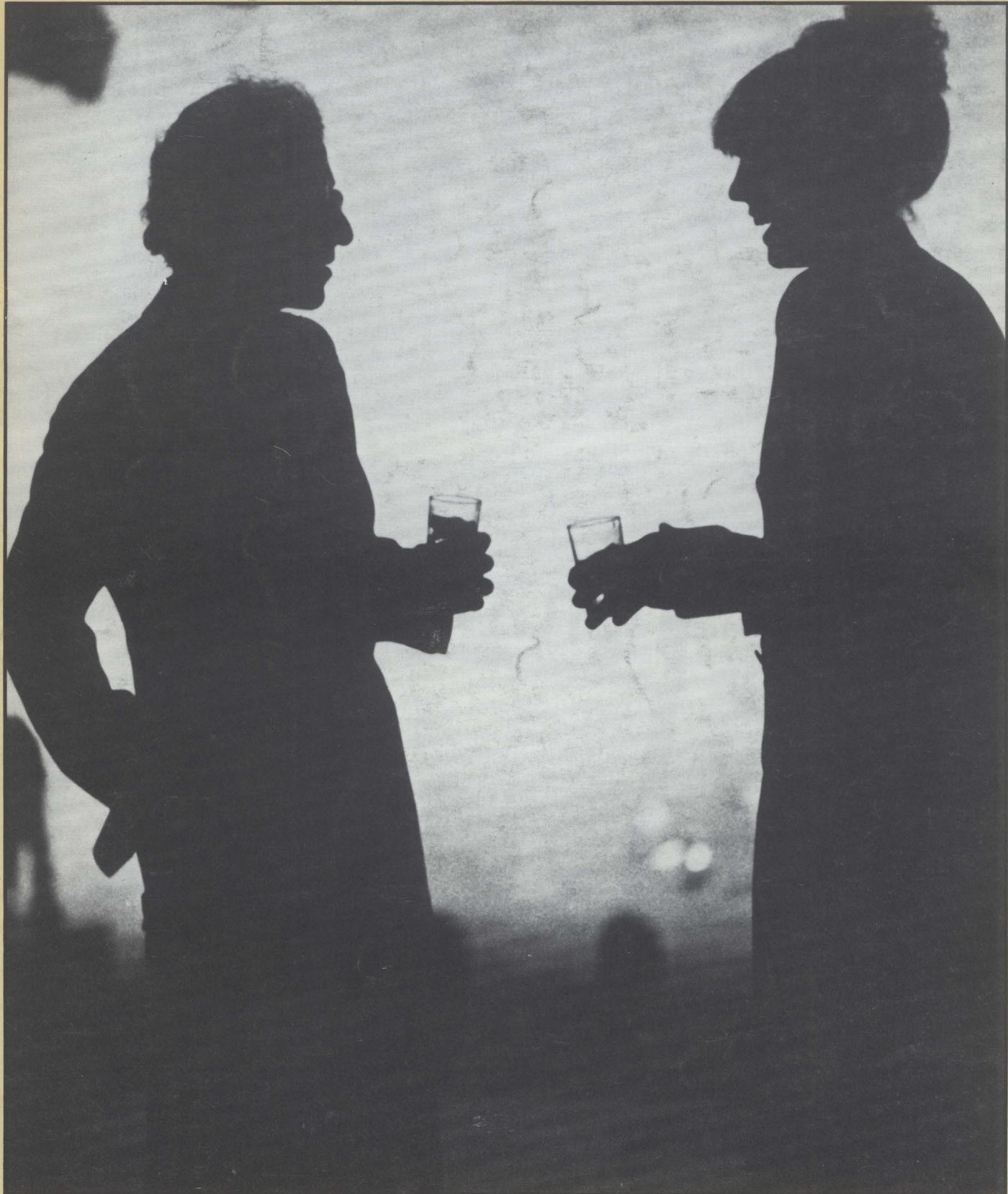


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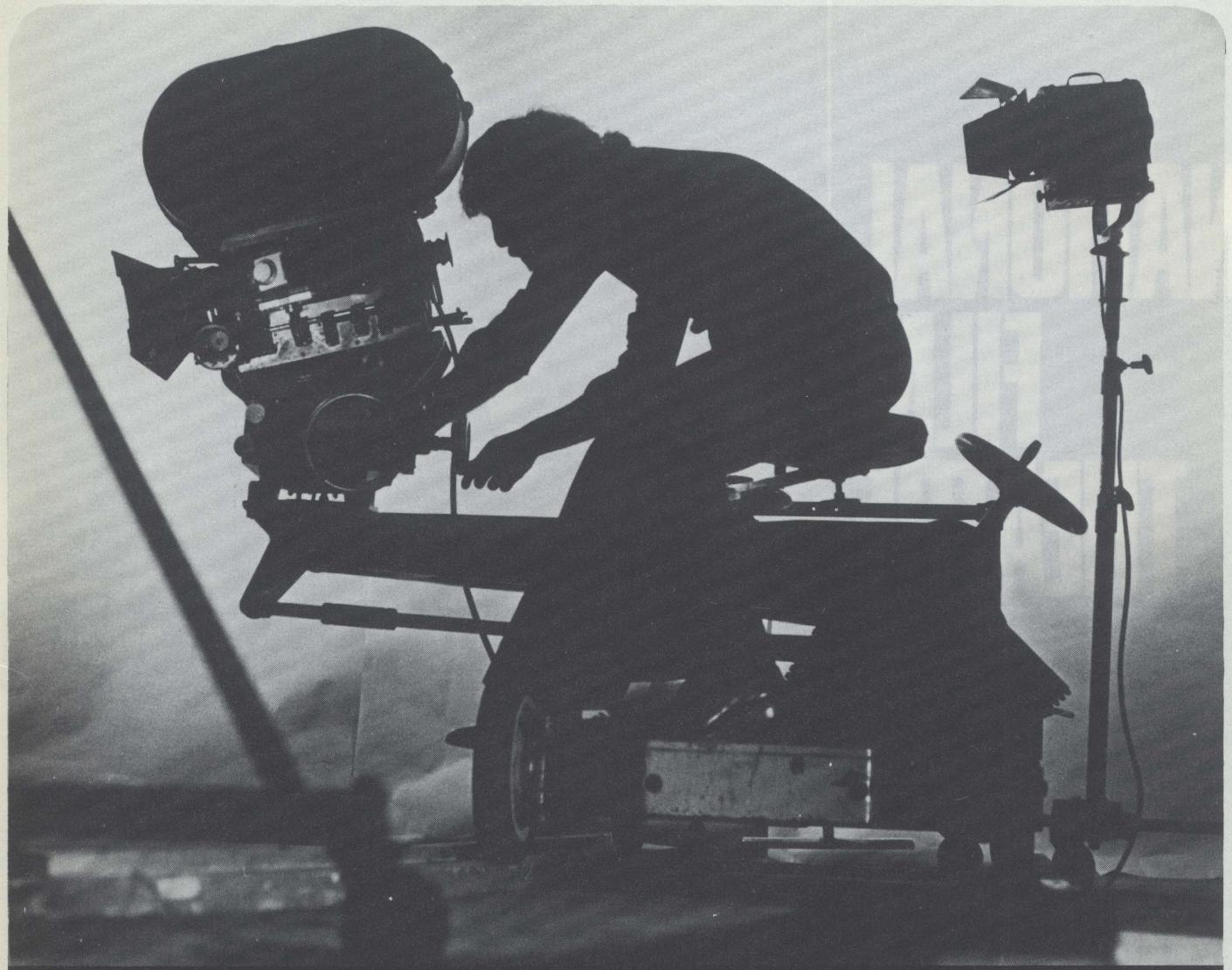
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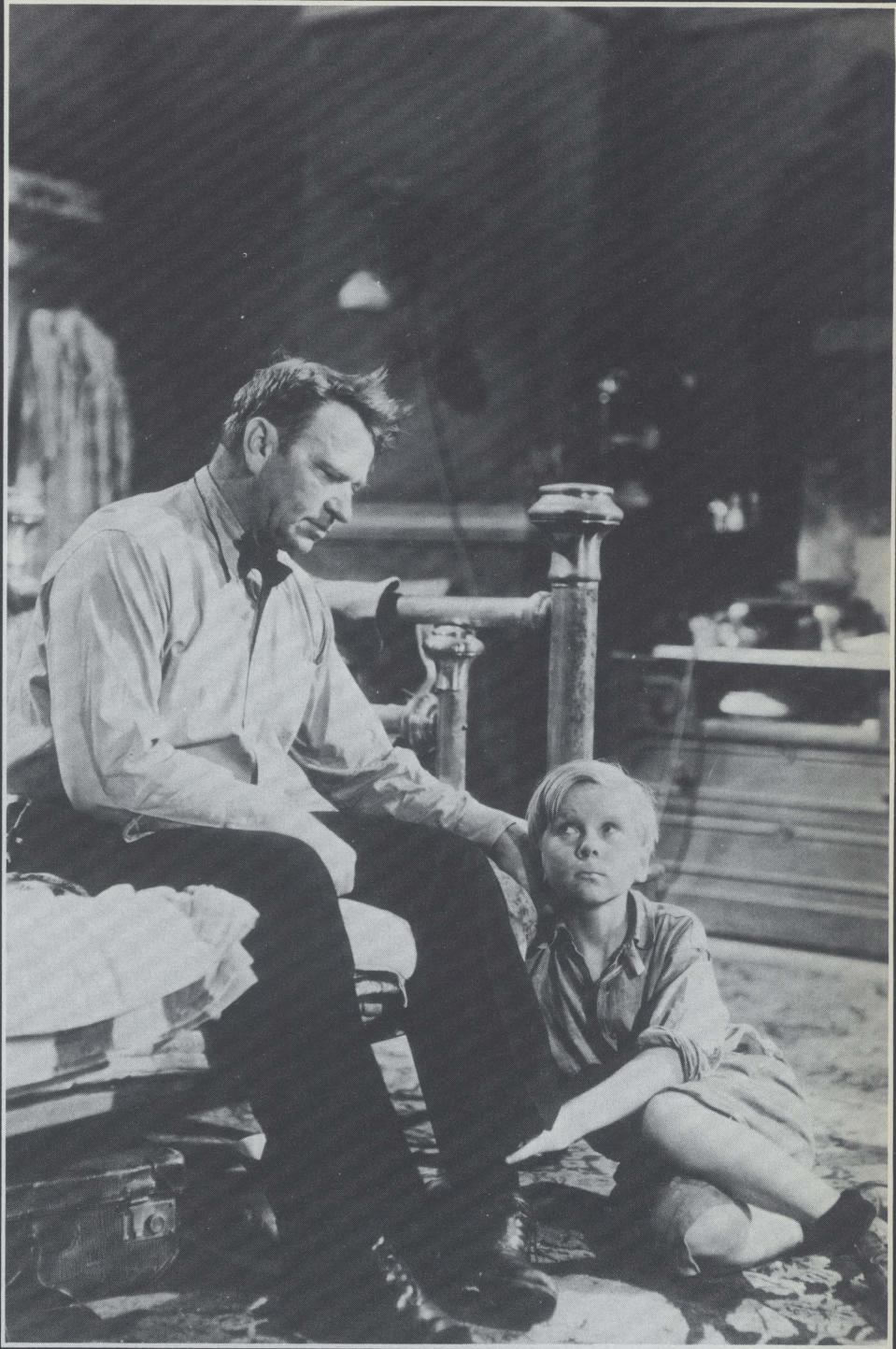
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SUMMER 1979

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On the cover: Woody Allen and Diane Keaton in 'Manhattan'

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'Quintet'

Richard Combs

Nashville is probably the film with which Robert Altman is reckoned to have made most impact on the American cinema, and most clearly to have laid down his personal ground rules. It was the film where Altman 'the artist' fully came out of the genre closet—though the preceding *California Split* might be seen as the bridge between the playful revisions of *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, *The Long Goodbye* and *Thieves Like Us* and this blockbusting assertion that there was a new game in town. Not that *Nashville* was exactly the unified product of a new aesthetic: within it, Altman could be seen reapplying old laws of popular appeal (the sheer multiplication of charming performances and behavioural detail) while challenging audiences to sort their own way through the maze of relationships and narrative threads. Equally, as piecemeal, diffuse and hard to pin down as it was in strategy, it offered political relevance—if not a message—that was accessible on an epic scale. The paradoxes might seem characteristic of a Hollywood producer-director who has achieved a degree of independence and is free to ignore trends in studio 'product' (whether satanist fantasy or science fiction) but not free of the need to reach the widest possible audience. With Altman, however, the paradoxes become a more unpredictable game of hide and seek. Given his ambivalence about the role of artist, his discomfort at being thought to have something 'important' to say, he deals guardedly with both himself and his audience. He frequently plays repressive producer to his own adventurous director; and in his covert ambition to out-De Mille De Mille with free-form jamborees for cast and audience, he is as often the most vulgar populariser of his most authentic experiments with narrative.

PLAYING THE GAME or Robert Altman and the Indians

In retrospect, the paradoxes of *Nashville* seem to have set the pattern for Altman's subsequent career. As an entertainer, his instinct has been alternately to indulge and baffle his audience, while as an artist his mood fluctuates from self-deprecation to defiant declaration. The films since *Nashville* might be traced in terms of a steady rise and fall, of audaciousness followed by retreat, or pretentiousness followed by unassuming amiability, or private dreams followed by public ones. Having struck the jackpot in the latter arena with *Nashville*, and then failed with *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* (which pushed the formula too far into social didacticism, not only an anti-Western but a Brechtian one), Altman resolutely went private with *3 Women*. He returned to the broad, open canvas with *A Wedding*—a social comedy which spared no contrivance of plot or character to provide something for everybody. In inverse proportion, *Quintet* seems to be his least audience-oriented picture to date (to judge from its dismal box-office in the U.S.); it is a dive back into the interior, an allegory so impenetrable that one is tempted to read it as a confession of Altman's doubts as an artist and plight as a commercial entertainer. True to form, he has resurfaced in remarkably short order with *A Perfect Couple*, which plays so lightly on its actors' charms (in numbers, a watered-down *Wedding*) that it looks like a genre piece (odd couples, kooky comedy) with very loose seams.

In the attempts to find an explanation for *Quintet*, it has been likened to *Images*, the 'art-house' film Altman made at a time when he was thought to be one of the pacesetters (*M*A*S*H*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*) in the New Hollywood genres. *Images* has definitely entered the record as an aberration: one of those essays in European sophistication by ambitious American directors, who in the process forgo the sophistication of their native cinema (all the compressed emotional, thematic and symbolic meaning of a highly evolved narrative tradition) for the sake of the literal representation of an 'idea'. Altman turned out a Laingian case history which held up a mirror, in fact all sorts of reflecting surfaces, to a disaffected personality.

But *Quintet* is cannier than that. It reveals the awareness of post-*Nashville* Altman that art (or truth, or life) is not something created by avoiding Hollywood clichés—the confidence of this period is also that he is no longer in danger of being overwhelmed by the old Hollywood—but an elusive or illusory goal that sustains the work in progress but is a doubtful commodity once it is complete. In this respect, it is almost anti-*Images*—since it declares the 'art' film a null and void pretension—and one of the purest of American films. It is a story without a subject, a form without meaning. For Altman, also, it has a kind of purity: if *A Wedding* positively sits up and begs to be liked, *Quintet* sits with its back to the audience and defies them to stay. It has stars, of course, but they are scarcely allowed to act in a way with which audiences could be expected to identify.

This makes it, along with *3 Women* and (to a qualified extent) *Buffalo Bill and the Indians*, Altman's most audacious work. Beyond that, it is the most extreme statement of the rationale of all those films. Too large to be called their theme, too amorphous to be

called their subject, Altman's concern with 'performance', with what happens to truth when one tries to find it through illusion, explains why those films were made. It is a nagging worry that crops up in pre-*Nashville* Altman, drifts drunkenly through that film, and now crystallises (leaves a masking of frost round the very frame, in fact) in *Quintet*, the 'point' of which, after all, is simply the game, quintet itself, a barren and meaningless thing, but the only thing there is.

In outline, the story would make a perfect Western, although the film in no way engages with Western elements, and certainly does not set itself against them, as do *McCabe* and *Buffalo Bill*. Instead of resisting convention, it accepts the mythic, apparently confident that its own nihilism is powerful enough to resist such a strain. Essex (Paul Newman), a seal hunter by trade, is making his way at the beginning across a snowbound waste, in an unspecified era, resignedly returning with his pregnant wife Vivia (Brigitte Fossey) to the city from whence he came and where his brother and family still live. Sources of food in the outside world now seem to be exhausted, and life in general is coming to an end. The city proves to be an inert, cheerless place: a bare, ramshackle honeycomb, coated with ice, where people huddle in rags waiting to die (and roving packs of dogs instantly move in on the remains) or, if they are lucky enough to have the calling, engage in the one life-giving activity (though its end, too, is death), the game of quintet.

The rules of the game remain obscure, but at the highest level it is orchestrated in city-wide tournaments, and players' names are circulated on pieces of paper, which establish who is entitled to hunt down and kill whom, depending on the outcome of the games. Soon after Essex's arrival, one player, Redstone, evidently not abiding by the rules, disposes of Essex's brother with a bomb which also kills the rest of the family, including Vivia. Before Essex can reach him, Redstone is killed by another player, St. Christopher (Vittorio Gassman). On the body, Essex finds one of the lists of names, and subsequently passes himself off as Redstone in order to penetrate the coven of

tournament players and figure out the 'system' behind the game and the meaning of it all.

One of the singular aspects of this plot is that it has little emotional resonance. Essex's quest is pursued less out of the instinct for revenge than out of the need to know; and audience interest (where it has not already been discouraged by this appearance of po-faced allegory) is sustained by the faint hope that, if not the rules of the game, then some faint glimmer of the context in which it is played will be revealed. Given the mysteriousness of what the characters are actually doing when they gather round the quintet board, there is little that can be deduced about the film from the actual tactics of game-playing. (Essex's brother is also a collector of quintet pieces, and in one of the film's more 'significant' lines, Essex explains what is meant by this example of a 'hobby': 'That's just something to do for no reason'.) *Quintet* is not, in other words, akin to those Boetticher Westerns described by Andrew Sarris as 'floating poker games where every character took turns at bluffing about his hand, until the final showdown.' A fascinating parallel, however, because it anticipates *Quintet* in plot and supplies the direct resonance that it lacks, is a little-acknowledged Western of 1960, *One Foot in Hell* (director, James B. Clark). Alan Ladd, as an ex-Confederate with a chip on his shoulder, rushes his pregnant wife into an Arizona town, where the locals' hostility to him as a stranger prevents him from getting the medicine she needs, and she dies. Now taken somewhat guiltily to the bosom of the community, he becomes a leading citizen and is eventually appointed sheriff. But rehabilitation proves merely to be a cover for his long-gestating revenge against the men most responsible for his wife's death.

The relevance of this is that it suggests where the meaning of *Quintet* might lie: in its sense of community, and the hero's degree of adjustment or oppression within it. But the significance here is special to Altman, and has little to do with any vision of the post-holocaust world. On the level, say, of Boorman's *Zardoz*, the allegory of *Quintet* is

'Quintet': Bibi Andersson



a non-starter, although it might be thought to share some of the artefacts of Boorman's film: its peculiar sense of costuming, for instance, whereby the citizens who are not merely heaps of rags affect a kind of Renaissance splendour, or the bits and pieces of a burnt-out culture that have gone to make up the eerie latticework of the city, or Essex's reminiscences to Vivia at the beginning about the city he remembers with a park, a lake and trees.

In particular, it would be difficult to reach any speculative conclusions about the government of the city, which seems to be divided between the mystic St. Christopher, who lives up to his name by tending the needy with soup kitchens and spiritual bromides ('You must cherish your tortured life, because it is a pause, an interruption of the void preceding and following it'), and the amiable, pragmatic but obscurely all-powerful adjudicator Grigor (Fernando Rey). The latter is the most curious figure, his enthusiasm for quintet and specious justifications of it representing a reactionary, death-oriented power more sinister than the opponents Essex, having become 'Redstone', must face over the game. The casting of Rey might even suggest a pointed reference—the discreet charm of the bourgeoisie in Nanook of the Northland—were it not for the fact that Altman never seems to make references to other films. His own work, perhaps, is too caught in the contradiction of being at once supremely unselfconscious—he is not interested in examining or reflecting the processes of his own imagination—and self-centredly obsessed with how that imagination might be most fully embodied in film. And Grigor's frustrating function here is the true measure of his villainy.

Seen in this context, *Quintet* is simply Altman's closest reproduction yet of the state of mind in which he makes films, and the impossible conditions which film-making (in the normal commercial course of events) imposes. If the story it tells appears to be exotic yet barren, complicated yet insubstantial, oblique yet literal-minded, then this may be because Altman has chosen to make a fiction about all those limitations on fiction-making, at least in the field in which he works. But the game does not represent something as clear-cut as Hollywood, the meaningless mechanics of the industry and its producers—though St. Christopher, patronising and repressive, suggests something of this. Altman's complaint is more to do with what is expected and made of film, and what becomes of the lives and talents of its practitioners when they are sucked into the competitive game of careers, reputations and artistic 'importance'.

St. Christopher is the high priest of ballyhoo, who plays the game seriously and finds significance in it because of the horror of life without it, as he expounds to the poor huddled masses in his theory of the five-sided view of existence. 'Five sides demand a sixth space, a centre, and that is what you have to look forward to. It's empty. It's blackness, void! Don't fight, don't struggle. Accept. When you think of the number five, remember... it's six.' Grigor, the arbiter of the rules of quintet, who decides which players are in and which are out, draws up the killing order but is never at risk himself, is evidently the critic. His final impassioned

defence of the game to Essex, declaring that the only prize is winning, staying alive, 'feeling the heat of the adrenalin rushing through your body', is answered by Essex's laying the body of the last victim on a brazier: 'The smell of death, that's about as close as you'll ever get to it.' The final indignity is the list. Another player, Ambrosia (Bibi Andersson), expresses, or affects, surprise when Essex talks of the killing as a ritual, carried out according to a prescribed plan: 'You must be wrong. Trying to find a meaning where there is none. Death is arbitrary. At least, that has always been the main complaint.' But for Altman, the list completes the picture of an arbitrary system, which enslaves its player-artists in a meaningless activity, then dispenses with them according to a predetermined but random plan. Critics have clearly worked on that list.

In the midst of all this death and waste, there are positive sentiments. Small and isolated, and linked to the vague assertion of hope in this impossible world, they really enshrine no artistic truth beyond the impetus that Altman feels to be behind his art. Opposed to the city and all its works is the symbol of the goose flying north, first noticed by Essex and Vivia at the beginning and later discovered in a poster on the wall of a bar, where Essex muses drunkenly, 'Does he know where he's going... or does he just fly into the unknown?' Which is what, inevitably, Essex must do, when he emerges from the game the only survivor and abandons the city, pursued by the entreaties of Grigor that he could be the greatest player of all: 'There is nowhere else to go. There is nothing more to be gained. There is nothing more to be learned. So searching is pointless. It is like spending the game in limbo.'

The something more to be gained for Altman in flinging off into the unknown is the rediscovery of dreams and memories. Both are invoked in the one tender interlude in *Quintet*, when Essex goes to bed with Ambrosia, and she wakes remembering the dream she had of her mother in a train (trains still exist in the city, but as just so much frozen statuary), and which gave her so much pleasure that she could feel the smile on her face when she woke up. When she confesses that she has never before taken account of her dreaming because she cannot relate to her past, cannot trust her memory, Essex asserts that memory is the only thing that can be trusted. At the beginning of the film, Essex is being driven back into the city from the south, now bereft of seals; at the end, he heads off to the north, rumoured to be equally desolate, though as he replies to Grigor, 'You may know that. I don't.' In between dreams and memories, north and south—respectively, the future and the past—there is only the city and quintet, the miserable present exalted by St. Christopher because it separates two inconceivable eternities.

Just how Essex is able to avoid the trap of the present, and make the journey in either direction, says much about Altman's conception of his own cinema. To begin with, Essex is an honest artisan, neither a manipulator of the rules (Grigor) nor a maker of large statements (St. Christopher) but a life-sustaining seal hunter, who quite earnestly (and rather comically, given the surrounding desolation) asks where he might find work as soon as he arrives in the city. Also he is an

interloper, an impostor, who confesses when invited to the quintet table that he doesn't like games and is only here for the 'education'.

One last factor is important, recalling the situation of the hero of *One Foot in Hell*, who in order to shatter the complacency of the society that has absorbed him, another impostor, must hire confederates (a scurrilous bunch from south of the border). Essex finds no confederates in the city—except, briefly and ambivalently, Ambrosia—and their absence is noticed. Looking through the shattered panels in the Information Centre, in order to find out something about the man whose identity he has assumed, he has a terse exchange with St. Christopher, after telling him that he is looking for a 'friend'.

ST. CHRISTOPHER: 'Oh, a friend. How interesting. Amicus. I haven't heard that word in a long time.'

ESSEX: 'And what do you use in its place?'

ST. CHRISTOPHER: 'Alliance. How did you and your friend become separated?'

ESSEX: 'Time.'

ST. CHRISTOPHER: 'Where does your friend live?'

ESSEX: 'He doesn't.'

Given the ideal 'community' circumstances in which Altman works, drawing freely on the collaborative/improvisatory talents of those around him, the true horror of the city and quintet is their nightmare individualism, their pacts and paranoia, secret lists and everlasting competition. One also wonders how much success Essex could have at the end pursuing his dream alone, although for Altman this seems to be a case in *extremis*, a celebration of the will to go on living/working even when the conditions that make it possible no longer exist. The fascination of the film is its purely self-regarding, self-destructive and, inevitably, self-pitying negativism—rapidly dwindling into redundancy as it demonstrates that, by turning away from the audience that Altman has usually included in his collaborative enterprise, and by concentrating on a steel-trap plot that is meaningless instead of the meanings produced by his actors within a plot that gives them room to manoeuvre, it has created the exact circumstances under which its creator cannot function.

Visually, *Quintet* even suggests the extent to which Altman has set out to prove a point. It is sparely organised and shot, with scarcely any of the panoramic views and overlapping dialogue with which Altman usually likes to suggest an abundance of life passing across his canvas. The tight framing, close grouping of actors, and minimal scenic use of the city set—which was actually an abandoned steel-grid structure on an island in the St. Lawrence River, open to the elements and requiring that all filming be done in freezing and frequently below-zero temperatures—make *Quintet* look as if it were shot in a relatively small area of studio space. Everything in the film, ultimately, is contained in a picture of arctic stasis, and in this respect, at least, it is somewhat akin to *Images*, which was as tight a structure of mirror effects, in order to make a point about schizophrenic breakdown.

If Altman has set out here with such frosty, single-minded determination to make a final statement, it may partly be because he feels the message has been missed before. *Quintet*, in fact, might be seen as *Buffalo Bill and the*

Indians without the Indians: Bill Cody's Wild West Show standing in much the same relationship to the history of the West as the game of quintet does to art. What the Indians represent is what is explicitly excluded from *Quintet*: an authentic way of dreaming. As one of the characters in *Buffalo Bill*, the 'legend-maker' Ned Buntline (Burt Lancaster) explains, Indians dream differently from white men. The only time the latter dream 'is when things are going their way' (things could scarcely be worse than they are in *Quintet*, hence perhaps the aridity of the city's dream life). Further, what white men do tends to be 'dreaming aloud'—i.e. mounting a Wild West Show/making a film—while for the Indian it is a process more intimately related to how he conducts his life: 'You sit on your horse and you dream. Then you go to where the dream might take place and you wait for real life to catch up.' The proof, eventually, is the visit of President Grover Cleveland to the show—a surprise for everyone but Sitting Bull, who has been expecting this opportunity to put his people's grievances to the President ('The White Father has come in response to Sitting Bull's dream').

In this connection, *Buffalo Bill* is both more complex and more confused than *Quintet*. More complex because instead of imposing the latter's deadlock—a fiction constructed according to rules which are implicitly rejected—it opts almost for a form of epic theatre (it was loosely derived from Arthur Kopit's play *Indians*) which allows different voices to comment on the fiction-making process. Most significant, of course, is that of Sitting Bull and the small group of Indians who come to participate in the 'new show business' at the invitation of its doyen, 'Buffalo Bill' Cody (Paul Newman). They express their dissent from his masquerade mainly through silence or withdrawal, or through the mild admonition of Sitting Bull's interpreter William Halsey about the farcical misrepresentation of the Custer Massacre, commenting only that Sitting Bull wasn't at the Little Big Horn, 'he was making medicine and dreaming'.

Closer to home are the comments of Ned Buntline, the dime novelist who did most to

fabricate the legend of 'Buffalo Bill'. He is distanced, however, as a kind of chorus, both dramatically and spatially (and perhaps also historically, given that he and Cody were estranged at this point after a dispute over the proceeds of the Buffalo Bill industry), by the fact that he sits throughout the film in a bar, in the Show grounds but with no clear physical relationship to what is going on, regrettably, enviously and ironically measuring how well Bill is putting across his myth of the West and himself. In this respect, *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* is also one of Altman's most visually intriguing films, his usual long-range view of human muddle (with accompanying symphony of voices) and the vainglorious spectacle of the Show neutralised and unified through a quaintly period and muddily indeterminate ochre wash.

Reading *Quintet* into *Buffalo Bill* may reveal how the Indians serve as a wistful function of Altman's failure to reconcile the interior with the exterior of his role as public entertainer. It also points up how insubstantial they are in any other terms, and how confusing if one tries to read the film as a tract about the genocide practised against them in fact and the way that policy has since been consistently distorted. At this level, the film is a false and theatrical fabrication, from its opposition of the obvious sham of the Wild West Show with the ineffable 'reality' of the Indians to its subversion of Bill's Wild West dream with a nightmare visitation from Sitting Bull's wraith, after the latter has left the Show and been killed 'accidentally' at the Standing Rock reservation.

Towards the end, the long-delayed meeting takes place between Bill and Buntline ('I was beginning to think you didn't exist'), after which Buntline leaves with the valediction, 'See you in hell, Bill.' A prediction appropriately enough fulfilled in *Quintet*, in which the egoistic showman finds himself consigned to a circle in hell peopled with others like himself, engaged in a perpetual contest of wills over meaningless stakes. Only now the hero has absorbed the lesson of the Indians—and/or the perspective of Buntline—and hungers for a more authentic way to spend his time. Given that the same actor plays the heroes of both films, it is perhaps not fanciful

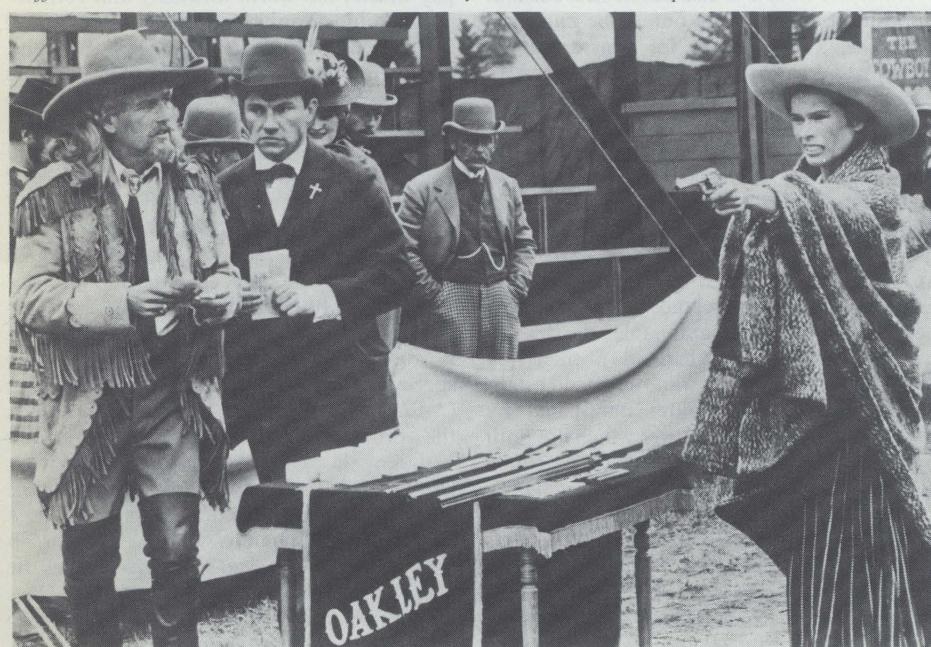
to see them related in terms of Altman's changing image of his own role: from the self-hatred implicit in the charlatan of *Buffalo Bill* to self-martyrdom in the exile of *Quintet*. If one transplants Essex into *Buffalo Bill*, however, the result might be a truer picture of the doubts and compromises which explain much of Altman's ambivalence: an artist unhappy with the presumption involved in playing God, making statements, even directing actors, but who has so far retaliated more with defensive strategies than positive alternatives. The defensiveness might largely be Altman's reaction to his own urge to play St. Christopher—a streak of uncertain generalisation that runs from the political perspective of *Nashville* to the social satire of *A Wedding*.

Interestingly enough, since he definitively abandoned the Hollywood genres with *Nashville*, Altman seems to have been intent on inventing a new kind of popular entertainment, a form in which the communal enterprise and creativity of actors, technicians and, ultimately, the audience count for more than any individual viewpoint. In this is both self-protection—the 'meaning' of the films becomes a function of what everybody puts into them, rather than of what the director intended to say—and some extreme form of the liberal quandary, how to give direction while seeming (or pretending) not to. This might be one alternative to playing the game excoriated by *Quintet*, and perhaps even a version of the interior magic with which Sitting Bull triumphs over the chicanery of *Buffalo Bill*. But if the 'Indians' represent a viable artistic alternative, rather than simply a metaphoric weapon, then only once has Altman fully explored the possibility, in the film which followed *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, 3 Women*.

This might even be described as literally a case of 'making medicine and dreaming'. The idea reputedly came to Altman in a dream: a picture of some ersatz, miniature suburbia set down in the Southern California desert, with actresses Shelley Duvall and Sissy Spacek already cast as two girls (one endlessly prattling about dates and domestic minutiae, the other a strangely wide-eyed, all-consuming adolescent) who share an apartment and work at a nearby geriatric spa. The film was a departure for Altman for many reasons. For once, the central performances were precise in meaning and execution, and ambiguity was derived not from some vague nexus of improvisation but from an indefinite context in which the interplay of colour and landscape suggested incipient transformations of a spiritual/psychological/meta-physical order. Altman seemed to have found his way through to a level of consciousness where he need no longer be frightened of the grandeur of his themes—youth and age, growth and change, civilisation and savagery—nor have to pretend that their exact significance depended on interactions beyond his control.

Their exact significance, of course, was never actually decided by the film. Altman remained sufficiently himself to ensure that no final interpretation could be ascribed to the director; but his approach had, for the moment, been turned around. Instead of presenting the audience with a mix of ambiguous characters and events, and Panavision imagery of indeterminate emphasis, to

'Buffalo Bill and the Indians': Paul Newman, Harvey Keitel, Geraldine Chaplin





'A Perfect Couple': Marta Heflin, Paul Dooley

allow them to resolve matters as best they could, *3 Women* seemed to sparkle with a clarity of image and idea which came together as ambiguity in the spectator's mind. The 'dream' context conceivably released Altman's inhibitions about being seen to take too strong a hand in ordering reality, whereas in normal naturalistic circumstances his personal contribution is guarded, indirect or ringed about with self-mocking qualification (most noticeably so in *A Wedding*). Even in *3 Women*, he has been inclined to skimp the full potential for metaphor—or to avoid the risk of incurring pretentiousness—by making easier connections in terms of plot and character. (The last third of the film is an unseemly job of tidying up.) But *3 Women* avoids Altman's worst tendency of indulging his cast and cheating his audience—by keeping his ideas out of harm's way—for long enough to make one regret that so far it remains an isolated experiment in his career.

During Essex's investigations in *Quintet*, he is told by St. Christopher that he will never understand the system until he is part of it, and by then, of course, it will be too late. Remembering that the artist-hero decamps at the end, pursued by this sibylline prophecy, in search of more viable forms of life and art, it is a little startling that Altman's next film, *A Perfect Couple*, should be perhaps the cosiest of this period. On the other hand, that Altman should allow the wintry intractability of *Quintet* to melt into this perfectly accessible, even old-fashioned, romance is not evidence so much of a full-scale retreat as an adroit side-stepping of the problems that his conception of his cinema raises. If anything, it moves into the public domain—where, according to *Quintet*, one is susceptible to all the rigidities of convention and the self-serving importance of a St. Christopher—with more grace and less schizoid manoeuvring than *A Wedding*.

The latter was certainly Altman's most ambitious attempt since *Nashville* to carve out a wide cross-section of his society, mainly as a platform on which to experiment with some curiously interlocking patterns. The social situations Altman deals with are seldom of interest in themselves—that way

lies the rhetoric of St. Christopher—and it is generally agreed that *Nashville* is less a portrait than a partial re-invention of the country and western Mecca. Again the irony is that Altman needs the social arena as a validation that his art and his concerns are not special to himself (any more than are his collaborative working methods), while rejecting any pretension to social significance. The quite complex reconstruction of *Nashville*, however, becomes in *A Wedding* a more slapdash pasting-together: even leaving aside necessarily unverifiable complaints about the reality of the film's social background—the splicing of an old-money Mid-West family with a *nouveau riche* Southern trucking family—it is impossible to make sense of this information in terms of the comic uses to which it is put. A full-scale satirical structure, to do with the Rituals of Families and Other Institutions, lurks shakily in the background, never very intimately connected with the minutiae of this particular wedding party, on which Altman prefers to dwell as a kind of baffling kaleidoscope, full of exotic comic detail.

A Perfect Couple is also based on a cultural opposition which turns out to be curiously affectless, a mechanism for generating the comedy that has little resonance in itself. Alex Theodopoulos (Paul Dooley), the eldest son of an old-world Greek family that maintains strict patriarchal decorum in present-day Los Angeles, their lives devoted to classical music and a large antique emporium, meets Sheila Shea (Marta Heflin), a singer with the pop group 'Keepin' Em off the Streets', through an audio-visual dating agency, Great Expectations. Their romance, diffident on her part, earnestly companionable on his, is hindered by the similar demands of their very different worlds: much time is spent establishing how they are both dominated by rituals and schedules, features which are both over-obvious and over-extended as comic gambits. Boy loses girl after a humiliating confrontation seems to prove that, if not personally, they are environmentally incompatible; Alex, however, pursues Sheila, becoming a groupie with the band until an excess of togetherness drives him back to his family, where he finds that his favourite sister,

a cellist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, has died of a congenital disease. Considered by his unforgiving father to be no longer part of the family himself, Alex joins Sheila in a date at the Hollywood Bowl, where a happy ending also unites Keepin' Em off the Streets and the Los Angeles Philharmonic on stage.

The first thing to note about this confection is that its Altmanesque features are more illusory than real. The conception of the film seems to have been a typically wayward process, born of Altman's desire to pair Dooley and Heflin (whom he had liked in small parts in *A Wedding*) and his collaboration with Alan Nicholls, songwriter and music impresario (Altman actor in *Nashville*, *Buffalo Bill* and co-writer of *A Wedding*), and creator of *Keepin' Em off the Streets* a year or so before their reconstitution for *A Perfect Couple*. Rather like the 'real' political campaign that was set rolling in *Nashville*, Altman launched the group with all the trappings of an actual press party, which then became a scene in the film; and like the musical accompaniment to *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, Nicholls' original songs for the group pre-dated the film, but were seen to have an integral relationship to its story. But if such circumstances suggest the ideal setting for a typically Altman set of interactions, it is a surprise to discover that *A Perfect Couple* is bound more by plot—though of an ironic, light-hearted, almost Lubitschian kind. The course of true love is principally smoothed by another couple, who dance peripherally and (until the very end) quite blissfully through the film, dropping connections that once or twice cause the main characters to exclaim 'Kismet'. Even the humour is less chaotic à la *Nashville* or *Buffalo Bill*, and more deliberately inconsequential, à la *M*A*S*H*.

Such qualities may make the film sound, in the context of Altman's work, sadly retrogressive. But to an extent, they supply it with an honest basis in sentiment and generic convention, and shore it against the bad faith of something like *A Wedding*, which pretends to a sophistication beyond its capricious narrative that it can never really bring itself to define. What, however, is disheartening about *A Perfect Couple* is that the various kinds of 'performance' it juxtaposes—classical and pop music; old-world formality and contemporary indeterminacy (both social and sexual)—never become significant tensions, as they do, say, in the anxieties of *Buffalo Bill*, Essex's baffled quest, and even (in more abstract terms) the changes in coloration of the three women. Since he detached himself from Hollywood's established forms and meanings, Altman has consistently worried over how his fictional performances might be weighed against 'reality'. It is an odd and inevitably naive preoccupation, but one which is central to the way Altman sees his work as a many-handed enterprise whose aim is to reproduce the ambiguity of each spectator's experience. In the least of his films (*Nashville*, *A Wedding*), he hopefully resolves the problem by blurring the distinction between the two; in the more rigorous (*Buffalo Bill*, *3 Women*, *Quintet*), squaring the world with men's fictions looks more of a Sisyphean task. In this sequence, *A Perfect Couple* is a curious dead spot, which raises the problem in a way that allows Altman to close most of his mind to it, and so effect the facile harmony of the closing musical number. ■

A Cannes Festival week offering new films by Francesco Rosi, Jancsó, Fassbinder, Fellini, André Delvaux, Volker Schlöndorff, Woody Allen and Terrence Malick seems alive, at least, with bright possibilities. Emerging at the other end, as from a tunnel hung with heavy but none too dazzling images, and with the impression that only the relative tyro Malick has taken a really significant step forward (although with a deferential bow in the direction of the much-lauded Woody Allen), one is tempted to some hesitant generalisations.

First, that levels of routine capability in film-making have probably never been higher, in the sense (not so elementary as it may sound) of getting pictures on the screen in a shape and order that make sense at least to the film-maker. It's getting harder all the time to make the kind of absolutely awful festival picture that announces itself in the first few incapable frames; mere mediocrity is not the same thing. Second, that even the best, or perhaps especially the best, are not at the moment finding it easy to excite themselves—essential prelude to exciting an audience. European cinema, at least, is probably due for the kind of changing of the guard of the generations that brought in the New Wave almost twenty years ago. The trouble is that the economic climate is all wrong for it. Risks are not being taken this year—and won't be taken next year. Slightly flabby, a little overweight, and with a Great Novel carried like a life-preserver in every haversack, the guard parades the quality tradition, which is so often killed but which never dies. Still, and with all reservations, there's a lot to see and something to admire.

Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*, a laconic tragedy set in the Texas wheatfields of 1916, is already in London and was discussed at length by Richard Combs in the Spring SIGHT AND SOUND. It didn't seem to go down all that well at Cannes—the chic *Manhattan* and the heart-on-its-sleeve *Norma Rae* roused an audience again in love with American movies to the loud cheers. But Malick is exciting partly because he's so unfashionably prepared to expend imaginative resource: he doesn't jib at absurdity (like the flying circus which briefly barnstorms across the Texas horizon), or at the sheerly beautiful (most of the film, majestically shot by Nestor Almendros and Haskell Wexler), or at incongruities which at times take on an almost Jamesian resonance. Perhaps the Jamesian echo, however remote, comes via his theme, which is a kind of *The Wings of the Dove* in reverse—here it's a rich farmer, supposed to be dying, who may be married for his money, promising the lovers a deceptively bright, guilty, never to be realised future—with further suggestions of *What Maisie Knew* in the role of the child who narrates in fits and starts, hovers, takes oddity in her lengthening stride. There are many other echoes: of the American Gothic, of Mark Twain, and back through Malick's own *Badlands* to films like *Bonnie and Clyde*. Malick holds them in balance by his sense of scale and gravity. People who dismiss the film—many seem to—as visually alluring but about nothing very much are looking for statements, when *Days of Heaven* through its spread of imagery offers implication, a sense of wonder at inconsequential destiny.

Manhattan is at the other end of the American grain. A funny, nervous, garrulous,



Above: 'Orchestra Rehearsal'. Below: 'The Tin Drum'

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New Yorkerish picture, everything that one would expect of its maker and certainly a little more, it floats in on an advance wave of American ecstasy ('The only truly great American film of the 70s'—Andrew Sarris). You can sense the audience in the Palais purring with pleasure as Gordon Willis' splendid black and white camerawork probes the skyline, and the Gershwin tunes suggest that if we wait long enough Fred and Ginger

might even round a street corner. *Manhattan* is a pleasurable experience, firing on all cylinders, as the failed romantic Woody Allen stumbles between three variously demanding women: his ex-wife (Meryl Streep), who is intent on exposing their marriage and his shortcomings to print in the dread cause of confessional exhibitionism, a chatterbox journalist (Diane Keaton) and a teenage actress (Mariel Hemingway). The jokes are as



fresh as ever; the culture chit-chat on target; and when Woody Allen, told that he seems to think he's God, answers sharply that 'I've got to model myself on someone', he is both reacting to past criticism and staking a claim for his own sense of moral destiny. The film's accuracy in catching a New York setting of neurosis and cultural gush and underlying despair, where even the analysts (or perhaps especially the analysts) have lost their wits, seems undoubted; and bound to appeal especially to the New York critics, as comforting assurance that the world they inhabit really exists.

Both the American films function essentially as movies, compact models that hold the road. The first of the literary Leviathans on view, Francesco Rosi's *Eboli* (a rather pointless abridging of the title of Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli*) brings up one of the current problems: the difficulty of deciding what is the definitive form, the one the filmmakers would be most satisfied with, when a film is cut down from a TV version, or about to be expanded into one (soon to be further complicated, of course, by the cassette version and other recycling). Rosi's film runs two-and-a-half hours, and in its television form will add another hour or so. Its account of the experiences of Levi (Gian Maria Volonté), a sophisticated North Italian, doctor and artist, exiled to barren, backward Lucania in 1935 for anti-Fascist activities, begins reflectively and expansively as a slow voyage of discovery, but by the end speeds up, as though we were getting cut-down versions of incidents to be further elaborated on television. Would Rosi have made exactly this film if there were only one version? Perhaps not. But although *Eboli* lacks the vigour of his best work, it still completes for RAI an exemplary Italian pastoral trilogy, with Olmi's *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* and the Tavianis' *Padre Padrone*. One sequence, in which Mussolini's speech about victory in Abyssinia echoes over a mighty tracking shot across the deserted, almost malevolent South Italian landscape, is a reminder of all Rosi's power. Elsewhere, this thoughtful, slightly flaccid film confirms his capacity for enquiry, his respect for historical process. I suspect that *Eboli* may look a bigger film when reseen in the context of Rosi's work in general, with its permanent commitment to the problem of the Italian South.

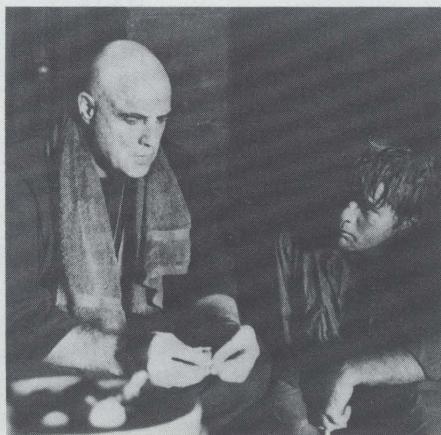
About Jancsó's *Hungarian Rhapsody*, or the first two completed parts of it, adding up to some three hours, one has no such confidence. David Robinson has written about the making of the film, based on the career through the first half of this century of a landowner who tries, as the synopsis expresses it, 'to find a path to those against whom he feels he has committed a crime'—in other words, the Hungarian peasantry. Jancsó deploys again all the familiar elements of his pageantry: the horses and naked girls and shirtless men, the torches, the troops of soldiers and peasants moving in counterpoint to the moving camera. And there are yellow roses; flocks of sheep; a roundabout on which soldiers spin dizzily; hang gliders brilliantly hovering like butterflies over the lake and mansion which form the main setting. There are, certainly, formal variations between the two parts which would repay analysis. And if you took almost any ten minutes, in isolation, you would find images of power and resonance, like the scene in

which a funeral pyre is set ablaze on the still lake. But the total effect, for me, is one of almost stupefying monotony, as though one were sitting for three hours under a slowly dripping tap. Jancsó's film is the most expensive ever made in Hungary. But can the pageant, with its simplifications, its ritual, its reliance on purely formal and repetitive elements, any longer speak in a significant way to a non-Hungarian audience? One doubts it.

Volker Schlöndorff's *The Tin Drum* is another kind of pageant—and most unlikely to reach Britain, it seems, in the present state of the law relating to the protection of children. Günter Grass' novel is one of those European great books which everyone knows and surprisingly few of us, it turns out, seem actually to have read. The problem for the film-maker is set by the homunculus Oscar, who beats his toy drum through some twenty years of disturbed German history and shatters glass with his high-pitched cries of rage; and has been solved by the casting not of a dwarf but of a grave, remarkable, diminutive 12-year-old, David Bennent. His accusing, enigmatic gaze is the best thing in a film which has the heavy-breathing tone of a work setting out to be nothing less than a masterpiece, hauling itself towards the heights through dependence on its literary source, its historical context and some bizarre sexual encounters between the tiny Oscar and larger ladies. Some of the film is remarkable, particularly the sense of Danzig as a place and a reality, torn between its German and Polish elements, and there's a nice scene (though no better and a thousand times bigger than the old British newsreel jape of cutting the goosestep to the Lambeth Walk) when Oscar's drumming disrupts a Nazi rally. But as a whole this is a gross film, promising more in some imposing early scenes than it ever manages to deliver.



Above: 'The Third Generation'. Below: Marlon Brando in 'Apocalypse Now'



On a more modest level, André Delvaux' *Woman in a Twilight Garden* (previously *A Woman Between Dog and Wolf*) also looks at a slice of recent history. Lieve (the admirable, intelligent Marie-Christine Barrault) marries Adriaan, a young Flemish idealist who goes off to fight for Germany on the Russian front; Lieve gives shelter and love to a French-speaking resistance fighter who takes refuge in her garden. The film follows its characters through to 1952—the husband locked in the past, the lover smoothly adapting to the present, the wife finally making off with her child. Delvaux probably needed to take this look at his country's past, but outside its specific Belgian context the material is familiar and the igniting spark missing. Always a sympathetic director, Delvaux seems not quite the film-maker for the long narrative haul, though he tries to make the garden and the house themselves function for key scenes as a kind of dream territory, the twilight zone where he's most at home. There is a notably good scene, too, when Lieve pays a wartime visit to her peasant relatives, who patronise her with kindness, then fall when her back is turned to scoffing their hoarded stores of farm produce.

One of the stranger sights at Cannes was a larger-than-life poster for Polanski's *Tess*, plastered over the facade of the Carlton and conveying a strong suggestion that Hardy's Tess, trapped in this daftly inappropriate setting, was contemplating escape through one of the upper windows. *Tess* itself will not surface until later in the year, but it's part of the present fashion for the nineteenth century novel, elsewhere much in evidence. At the eccentric end comes Téchiné's *The Bronte Sisters*, with Marie-France Pisier (Charlotte), Isabelle Adjani (Emily) and Isabelle Huppert (Anne) stoically impersonating the sisters, Branwell toiling strenuously in the local pub, a brief appearance by Thackeray (as, inevitably, 'the author of *Barry Lyndon*') and reference to Dickens (as, bafflingly, 'the author of *Mugby Junction*'). The Channel seldom gapes more widely than when the French essay English literary themes, coupled in this case with culinary cross-purposes, when Branwell's employer throws a tantrum because the roast lamb isn't pink at the centre. Téchiné bathes some interiors in a strange golden light, throws in a final visit to the opera like a belated homage to Visconti, and conveys little sense that his Haworth trio, between them, could have managed to scribble 'Mary had a little lamb'.

The Australian competition entry, Gill Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career*, is based on a novel published in 1901, about a spirited, wayward girl from a poor farming family who can't decide whether to fall in with everyone's expectation that she should marry a local landowner, or follow her own resolution to become a writer. It's a sympathetic film, often quite appealing in detail and keeping the tone of a minor period novel, but let down by a distinctly repertory level of performance from everyone except the heroine (Judy Davis). Australia's out of festival films, briefly sampled, looked in general less engaging than last year's muster, though Bruce Beresford demonstrates robust versatility with *The Money Movers*, a very gritty thriller about crime among security guards.

Britain's official entry, *The Europeans*, caused a bit of a pre-festival squall, in that a

film produced by an Indian, directed by an American and filmed in New England, though made largely with NFFC money, did not strike the BFPA as quite adequately British. But the Merchant-Ivory film satisfies the technical requirements of national status, and in the absence of anything more evidently home-grown which the Festival were prepared to accept, played its part very honourably. Henry James' early novel, of glancing social comedy and ironic implication, about the disruption caused in a decorous New England family by the arrival of their dangerously Europeanised kinsfolk, is adapted by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala with unfailing felicity. Set in a red-gold New England fall, and filmed in settings of sober and immaculate charm, the film lacks the special magic of the team's recent *Hullabaloo*, but has style, grace, and a particularly taking performance by Lisa Eichhorn, who has since done Milly Theale on television and seems fated to be type-cast as the gravely adventurous Jamesian heroine.

In fact, the old complaint that the cinema isn't offering enough good parts for women sank virtually without trace this year at Cannes. The third American entry I saw, Martin Ritt's *Norma Rae*, finds a backward corner of American industry, a Southern textile mill where the unions are still actively resisted, and tells an old-fashioned, unquestioning tale of a spunky woman (Sally Field) working with a Jewish union organiser from New York to bring the workers to a sense of their rights. The film has an eye for its setting, though the heroine's behaviour takes on an unappealing hysterical edge which the movie seems to regard as highly commendable, and the union organiser, who brings culture as well as the labour movement into her life with a few tags from Dylan Thomas, is really too much of a good thing. I preferred, to this over-sugared view, the American film in the Critics' Week, John Hanson and Rob Nilsson's *Northern Lights*, which is shot in plain black and white and tells in dour, semi-documentary terms of the unionisation of the North Dakota farmers in 1915. Although *Northern Lights* requires a certain patience, it has the sense of reminiscence, hard winters, lived experience—and it's fascinating to see the gaunt prairie houses, like the one in *Days of Heaven*, in a film taking such a different view of the land.

All in all, a festival with its mind on literature and the past, though there were more up-to-date experiences. Fassbinder's *The Third Generation*, about terrorism, has the most riveting credit titles seen in years, and strikes evident Godardian echoes, with its chapter headings, appearance by Eddie Constantine, and a corridor like those of *Alphaville*. Fassbinder's thesis is that the third generation of terrorists 'don't know what they are doing and the sense of doing it is in the doing itself, in the seemingly exciting danger, in the delusive adventure in this more and more frightening, perfect system.' One might quarrel with this, particularly the 'perfect system' theory; and with the film, which is staged with insolent assurance, sly references, and a soundtrack in which dialogue often seems to be doing battle with the sound from a television set. But I would prefer to wait for a second, more considered viewing.

Alain Corneau's *Série Noire*, in which a door-to-door salesman, played by the frenetic



Bulle Ogier in 'La Mémoire Courte'

Patrick Dewaere, becomes involved in a doomed, cracked and in every sense disordered murder plot, is based on a novel by Jim Thompson, who adapted *The Killing* for Kubrick and wrote the script for *Paths of Glory*. The French passion for picking up little known American novelists, operating in areas of seedy and outlandish city crime, is still in evidence; and the film, as unvirtuous as its subject, and set in a Paris suburb of crumbling houses and derelict waste land, could perhaps be seen as a late 70s version of *Breathless* or *Shoot the Pianist*, blowzy and coarser-grained.

Alain Tanner's *Messidor* (called *Contre Coeur* at the time of a SIGHT AND SOUND interview last January) is the story of two girls, hitch-hiking through prosperous, beautiful, orderly Switzerland, playing games of survival after their money runs out and their escapades with a stolen gun, picked up by a television programme, turn them into fugitives in their own country. The demands of festival schedules prevented me from seeing the film through to the end, but to the point where I left it looked striking. Not so much, necessarily, as an expression of that permanent unease Swiss artists seem to feel about their rich, staid country, but as an account of tethers running out, time passing. *Messidor* conveys, as not too many films do, a sense of an experience actually carrying the protagonists along, as they try to reinvent their lives from day to day.

Finally, Fellini's *Orchestra Rehearsal*, running just over an hour and in its idiosyncratic way a rather exemplary fable. Fellini plays jokes with the presentation of a routine 'arts' documentary on TV, lets his orchestra gradually assemble, pretends to interview the instrumentalists. There's a harmony achieved in the playing of Nino Rota's music; total disruption when the members of the orchestra first insist on a break and then run amok, tearing the place apart; and a threat from outside, in the form of the appearance of a great building demolition ball, poised to crash into the rubble. Order is restored, art asserting itself in the face of hazard, but the

conductor's commands are finally and disturbingly shouted, now in German... Fellini, quite rightly, resists 'strictly political interpretation' saying only that 'the film should communicate a sort of dread and emotion, a kind of shame, the anguish of daily terror.' It's a film from which evident and rather naive conclusions can indeed be drawn; but also deceptive, insinuating its unease, getting through beneath the skin. I think that Fellini has pulled it off—just. Seeing it again, one might feel differently. As I left the cinema, it was to come upon a file of policemen, assembling with slung rifles, riot shields and helmets. Later in the day, there was to be a *manifestation*. Full riot gear in the sun, among a strolling crowd as idly innocent as Cannes can muster, does certainly reinforce Fellini's point, like the obscure menace of his demolition ball. In life, as through art, a kind of shame.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

If there was a trend at Cannes this year, it was towards the utilisation of literature; in almost every case, the results were unsatisfactory. John Huston came a cropper in his film of Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*; Herzog failed in his adaptation of Büchner's play *Woyzeck*, and Bo Widerberg sadly muffed the film version of Knut Hamsun's *Victoria*, a charming book which ought to have suited his talents.

I am not talking here about fidelity to the original texts. As Alexandre Dumas said about the use of history in a novel, it is permitted to violate history as long as one gets her with child. In some cases, my knowledge of the originals goes back a long way. I haven't read *Wise Blood* since the mid-50s, but my memory of the book does not square with what Huston put on the screen. O'Connor was a weird, wonderful, baroque writer, and her tale of southern Protestant fanaticism has been portrayed by Huston with a clear, objective eye; which is precisely

what was not wanted for such a book and such a subject. As a Catholic, O'Connor may have disapproved of the religious excesses of her characters, but she seems to have understood them and made them credible. Huston only shows them to us as freaks—and this defect is accentuated by the fact that his protagonist (Brad Dourif) has only one expression, that of an obsessed loony.

Herzog's failure with *Woyzeck* was more predictable and, in fact, he said that all his friends did predict it. He had originally wanted to cast Bruno S. as Woyzeck, but then, one night, he had a flash of inspiration: only Klaus Kinski could play the role. Kinski is an extraordinary actor, but—like Barbara Stanwyck in her version of *Stella Dallas*—the one thing he cannot play is dumb. *Woyzeck* marks the introduction into literature of the lumpen-proletariat and, try as he may, Kinski is unable to convince us that he is not smarter, more powerful and altogether more prepossessing than anyone else in the film. The other problem was that Herzog chose to shoot the film in an absolutely ravishing old Czech town. I don't know if *Woyzeck* can survive outside the claustrophobic limits of a stage, but this operetta-like village was probably a mistake. Herzog is obviously going through some crisis in his creative life: his two latest films, *Woyzeck* and *Nosferatu*, are both adaptations of existing work. One can only hope that he will be able to tap some new personal lode—and soon.

Literature was also the undoing of Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. This is perhaps a minority view, since the film was much appreciated at Cannes and shared the Grand Prix with *The Tin Drum*. The work on which it is based is of course *Heart of Darkness*, a story generally regarded as one of Conrad's masterpieces. I remember that when I came across derogatory remarks about it in Leavis' *The Great Tradition* I was greatly annoyed. But rereading the story just before seeing Coppola's film was something of a revelation; and what Leavis (and E. M. Forster) complain about in the book helps to explain what is wrong with the film. 'Is anything added to the oppressive mysteriousness of the Congo by such sentences as: "It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention"?' asks Leavis. 'The same adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery,' he continues, 'has the effect not of magnifying but of muffling.'

Coppola goes that road, too. The first half of the film is the more satisfying: it is loud and flashy, with plenty of cinematic effects. There is much entertaining satire of the American military in Vietnam, but no attempt to come to grips with what the Americans were doing there in the first place. Coppola is right when he insists (as Cimino also insisted about *The Deer Hunter*) that this is not a film just about Vietnam. But if it is not about Vietnam, then what is it about? Coppola is not the person to ask, I think, since he has still not decided how to end his film. He showed one version in the Palais, but the next day on the Rue d'Antibes the audience got a different last scene. And they were asked, as God knows how many other people have been, how they liked the ending. Coppola says this is because he works like a theatre director and uses out-of-town try-outs to perfect his work. If the Cannes Festival is not considered to be 'town', I suppose we will

all have to wait until the New York opening in August.

The other trend of the Festival was the preponderance of American films: in and out of competition, they constituted almost a quarter of the main event. *Hair* was the opening night gala, but rather a sad one. It seems to me that it is either too late or too soon to film *Hair*, and although Milos Forman has probably managed as well as anyone could have done, the film seems a rather sad and shapeless lament for the 60s. James Bridges' *The China Syndrome*, on the other hand, is thoroughly up to date: as everyone probably knows, its career has not exactly been disadvantaged by the recent incident at a nuclear plant near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, an accident which came uncannily close to the fictional one in the film. Jack Lemmon won the Best Actor prize as the engineer who begins to have doubts about the safety of the nuclear plant in which he works; and Jane Fonda is equally splendid as the Barbara Walters (or Angela Rippon) type of newscaster who finally succeeds in alerting the public. The film is a melodrama, certainly, but a very absorbing and entertaining one.

As usual, some of the more rewarding films were shown outside the Palais—either in the 'A Certain Glance' catch-all (which is sponsored by the Festival) or in the Directors' Fortnight (which is not). This year the Directors' Fortnight was shorter than usual—perhaps because there were fewer films available, or perhaps because, as the organisers claimed, the Festival snatched them for its 'Certain Glance' programme. The word catch-all for this is not unmerited. It included Fassbinder's *The Third Generation*, which to my mind was one of the best films seen in Cannes and should have been in competition. It also included the latest film by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, whose work has always previously been part of the Directors' Fortnight. In this particular case, however, I know that the Straubs themselves chose to show their film under the Festival aegis.

From the Cloud to the Resistance is one of their most original films, being an adaptation of two works by Cesare Pavese: *Dialogues with Leucò* and *The Moon and the Bonfire*. 'From the cloud ... that is, since the appearance of the gods, or more precisely since their invention by man, until the resistance—almost immediate—of the latter against the former, as much as until the Resistance against fascism.' The dialogues (six of which are used) are between mythological figures, but they have been chosen to shed an oblique light on the novel *The Moon and the Bonfire*, which deals with the partisan movement in Piedmont as seen through the eyes of a man who has returned from America to find out just what happened. Infinitely more accessible than the Straubs' last film, *Fortini/Cani*, *From the Cloud to the Resistance* is at times extremely elliptical; at others it fascinatingly explores 'real time', as in the unforgettable sequence of a farm wagon bearing Oedipus along the dusty roads of Piedmont. Someone complained that the Straubs have painted themselves into a corner, and maybe this is true. But what a pleasure to watch two people doing their thing, unaffected and uninterested in the ebb and flow of film fashion.

There were three important films in the Fortnight, two of which got FIPRESCI

awards—Ken Loach's *Black Jack* and Pál Gábor's *Vera's Training*. *Black Jack* is an adaptation of a children's novel by Leon Garfield. But Loach's film is not only for children—the adults who made up the audience cheered it loudly. It was indeed a relief to see a rattling good period yarn beautifully acted and photographed, and with the perfect happy ending. The film is bound to be coming out very shortly, so I'll leave it at that.

Vera's Training will also be seen in Britain; the enterprising Gate has taken it. It is based on a short story set in Hungary in the autumn of 1948. As Pál Gábor puts it, 'We witness the birth of a hardening [read: Stalinist] era, marked by the cult of personality. Vera Angi's fate, her betrayal both of her love and herself, and her choice of another alternative, shows that society can be manipulated only if there are manipulatable people.' The ambiguity of this statement comes partly from translation; but it also represents a very real ambiguity in the film. Vera is educated at a Party school, and when the final auto-critique session comes, she bursts out and denounces herself and her married lover. There are several possible interpretations to this ending. I know some people came out saying Vera was a first-class bitch, while others saw her as a brave and noble girl. There is no doubt, however, about the horrors of Stalinist indoctrination and its intolerable smugness.

Eduardo de Gregorio's *La Mémoire Courte* also deals with moral ambiguities, but in a completely conscious way. The subject is the discovery by an ingenuous young UNESCO translator (Nathalie Baye) of a network which in the 40s used to supply passports and South American homes for Nazis, but which is now making just as much money by reversing the process: finding new passports for the old Nazis so that they can come back and take their place in the European economic community. The title evokes Pétain's statement: Frenchmen, you have a short memory. But the film (script by de Gregorio and Edgardo Cozarinsky) goes much further: the real horror of our time is invoked by the discovery of our heroine (and her associate, played by Philippe Léotard) that when they finally track down the leader of this network they cannot expose him because everyone knows who he is and nobody cares any more.

But *La Mémoire Courte* is not a political melodrama like *The China Syndrome*; it is not simply a superior realisation of a good script. Rather, like *The Third Generation*, it is very much a film, one which shows us familiar things in a different way. It is further blessed with a brilliant performance by Bulle Ogier—two performances, actually, because we see her in the flashback sequences as a younger woman, and in the present as a woman of forty, and it's hard to say in which role she is the more stunning. There is a shot of Montmartre in which the Sacré Coeur looks very unlike itself; when I asked de Gregorio, he explained that he had photographed it from a tower block of flats in the 19th arrondissement. Somehow, the simple fact of having had the inspiration to show us something from a point of view from which it has never, perhaps, been seen before, is symbolic of the film as a whole. Many of the elements are familiar, but they are all 'changed utterly. A terrible beauty is born.'

RICHARD ROUD



THE RELUCTANT EXILE

'Don Giovanni': Losey and the avenging trio arriving at the Villa Rotonda

Richard Roud

This interview with Joseph Losey was taped at the Billancourt studios near Paris, where he was just beginning the mixing of his latest film, *Don Giovanni*. The film is now completed and will be released in Europe and America in the autumn. But we didn't talk about *Don Giovanni*; I had only seen a rough assembly. The stills accompanying this interview should give some idea, however, of its visual splendours. Instead, I asked Losey to talk about his experiences in Britain, from the time he arrived in 1951 until he left (temporarily, he hopes) in 1974. About how he felt, at this point, about the nearly twenty-five years he had spent working in Britain. Losey had just had his seventieth birthday in January, so it seemed like a good moment for a backward philosophical look. It's odd, as Susan Sontag once remarked, that the popular use of the word 'philosophical' refers only to the Stoic school of philosophy. Why? But, seventy or not, Losey is by no means philosophical in that sense.

JOSEPH LOSEY: Out of the four to five hundred people who were blacklisted in Hollywood, most were writers. A very few were producers; Adrian Scott and Sidney Buchman come to mind. And there were only thirteen directors. None of the directors chose England as a refuge except for Cy Enfield and myself. I'm very glad that I did. Not only because of the common language; if I had come to France, I would have been forced to learn French properly, as Jules Dassin did. Julie got preferred treatment from the French unions just as I did from the British unions. But I can't think of any country in the world where people would really have gone to bat for me in the way that many English people did. And I'm very grateful for this. It's symptomatic of an important aspect of British life still—I hope it is, anyway.

Because of my own peculiar situation, I

had a hard time getting started in Britain. But I was lucky in choosing a country where civil and individual liberties still meant something, and where there were people who would fight for those rights even if they didn't agree with the convictions of the person they were defending. I'm talking about people like Sir Leslie Plummer, without whom I would never have been able to stay. I was on 30-day notice for a long time, and there was a year when I didn't even have an American passport any more. Of course the Americans were pretty well established as the major source of finance for British films at that time, and the unions were restricting the number of foreign directors who could work in Britain; there was immense pressure on the unions *not* to include me in the list because no major company wanted me. The majors wanted their own directors to work. I shall be

everlastingly grateful to George Elvin and various other people in the unions who gave me priority precisely because I was a political resident—resident because of politics, because of the situation in the U.S.

I think there is an awful new kind of chauvinism growing in the States now. I saw a magazine just this week with an article by Ernest Lehman in which he said that Hollywood has been on the defensive long enough, and that he was going to take the offensive. He then went on to describe any interest in foreign films as snobbish and anti-American. *Anti-American!* It's the same old bullshit, but it's not bullshit: it's dangerous, and it's a calculated expression of an attitude.

Did you ever run into that in England—I mean, people who were against you because you were an American?

In the very beginning, I certainly did, up to the point where they knew me. On the first films I made the crews were particularly suspicious of me, and maybe for good reason. I don't know. I was in a terribly tough spot, and I had to try to make films that I didn't whole-heartedly want to do (and didn't have the facilities to do). I had to try to make such films a little better than they might have been otherwise, and so I probably pressed the crews more than was comfortable or even decent. I didn't realise I was doing it, but there was, as a result, a certain backlash. But I think that by the time I left Britain I was popular with most of the people I'd worked with.

One of the most important men in that period was Leon Clore. It was he who finally

enabled me to get my name on a film again after five or six years of anonymity. I had made other films but under false names. Another important factor in keeping going in the 50s was the advent of commercial television. In those days there was a freedom which no longer exists in Britain or anywhere else in the making of TV commercials. The commercials were a very good field for learning and experimenting. The copywriters were not yet capable of taking over—they still aren't capable, but they have taken over. But then they were too fearful of the new medium to do it.

I did something between two hundred and three hundred commercials. I had contracts with J. Walter Thompson and BBD & O and several other big agencies. They gave me a retainer, and when I was free, I did twelve a year. They gave me a wide selection to choose from and a wide measure of control. I made a couple that were so good they were never shown! One of them, I'm now ashamed to say, was for Bachelor's cigarettes, with music by John Dankworth. I think it was absolutely marvellous, but the agency finally rejected it, as they did a few others. Not the client, mind you, but the agency.

Another one that I was very fond of was for Aero chocolate, with a score by Richard Lester. You know, Lester never worked as a director in America. He was a band-leader; well, he had a band, let's say. He could play practically every musical instrument, and for Aero he composed this score for, as I recall, twelve trombones. I took a week to shoot it; we had a whole stage with a glass floor at Nettlefold, and there was this one ballet dancer. She started her dance in long shot and the camera moved in on her until we eventually got to the pack-shot. It was a very good commercial, I thought. But those were the days... Robert Krasker lit it, when his career was in full bloom.

Making commercials was a way of not doing the pictures you didn't want to do. An alternative way of making a living, which is something you really must have if you are going to be selective. You have got to be able to say 'no'. It's really the only freedom of

choice anywhere in the commercial world. I meant to say in the capitalist world, but really in any world, I should say, because from what now seems to be coming out of the East, there isn't even the choice of saying No there.

It was a strange progression for me: from the Middle-West, where I was born, to New York City, to Hollywood, to Italy when I was first blacklisted, then to London and from London to Paris.

When you first came to London, did you think you were going to spend as much time as you did there?

I had no plans! How could one have plans, then? In my mind, I didn't think of it—I couldn't have faced it, then. Not from any dislike of England. I preferred it as a place to live and I still do—if it were possible. But the idea of being cut off from my roots during the thirty most fertile years of my life (was it thirty?... I'm now seventy...).

Did you ever think or hope that you might go back to the States in those early days?

Oh yes. And I tried to. Eventually several things were offered to me from the U.S., but they were always things I couldn't accept. And whenever I could propose something, it was always rejected. But I don't know how serious those offers I got really were. They were always for pictures of the kind that I had never made or ever wanted to make, never will make, and probably that I couldn't make. You know, committee-controlled studio, committee-produced, committee-cut, etc.

At the time you arrived in Britain, were there any British directors or films you particularly admired?

No, I was more interested in the French and in the Italian neo-realists. At that time. Although of course there were some British films I shall remember all my life. Some of them I have reseen, some not. Some of the ones I have reseen don't stand up, some do. Like *Brief Encounter*, *Fallen Idol*.

Were those two that stood up?

I said, some do and some don't. I'm not specifying.

Did you fraternise much with British directors when you lived there?

That kind of relationship—which does exist in France—didn't in Britain. I tried, with Dick Lester and others, but particularly with Dick, to set up a kind of directors' company, or collective, in which we would each cross-collateralise the others' work. We would agree to limit ourselves in certain budgetary and other ways in return for freedom of choice of subject and control over what we were doing. But we were never able to get by the distributor bloc.

Lester, of course, is also an American. Was there ever any connection between you and the Free Cinema group?

No, except for Leon Clore who was connected with them, and he was—as I said—the first person to give me credit on a feature. Now there was that company controlled by the Carreras, what was the name, Hammer, right, and they put my name on a half-hour short, and that was the real first. But they had no interest in selling that short to America, so they weren't taking so much risk. The real risk was taken by Leon Clore and John Arnold and his partners in that set-up. Karel Reisz was also at one point a producer for an advertising agency, I think, and I made an hour-length Ford commercial for him. So that was a connection with Free Cinema!

People always say that the big boom in British films in the 60s was thanks to American money invested in Britain. How much American money was there in the films you made?

None. Wait a minute. No, that's not right. In the beginning, there wasn't. Carl Foreman put together my first feature in Britain [*The Sleeping Tiger*], but I don't know exactly where he got the money from. Eventually it was sold—on very bad financial terms—to the U.S. My first American-financed film in Britain was, unless I'm mistaken, *Blind Date*. I'm not sure where the original finance came from, but somewhere along the line Sidney Box sold it to Paramount for more than the cost of the film. So it was in profit by the time it was completed.

This was the big opportunity for me and Ben Barzman and a number of other people who had been blacklisted to regain a little of our home territory, in a sense. However, as you know, *Variety* and some other publications struck out at us as soon as they heard that Paramount had bought the film. So it never got a New York opening. The release was delayed, the whole promotion campaign was changed. At that time, one of the vice-presidents of Paramount came to see me in London and offered me a three-picture deal with a lot of freedom; but as soon as this bad publicity came along, that was the end of the deal. It was dead, and I was back where I started. In fact, for two years I couldn't get any work in England. But I must say that there always seems to have been someone who was within rescuing distance, because there were a lot of times when I could easily have gone down and disappeared under the rapids.

I do very much want to make one or two films in the United States before I end my career; and the end of my career will, I trust, be simultaneous with the end of my life. I can't see myself as a retired person. There was

'Don Giovanni': Kenneth Riegel, Kiri te Kanawa, Edda Moser



a story in the *Tribune* last week about a woman who got a fifty million dollar divorce settlement in California. Her husband had a hundred million, and under the community property laws of California she got her half. My secretary Anne asked me what I'd do if I suddenly had fifty million dollars, tax free, no strings. And I said immediately, without thinking, that I'd buy the Norfolk house I lived in during the shooting of *The Go-Between* and settle down there for a couple of weeks.

A couple of weeks?

That's right. A couple of weeks. That house is the only material thing I ever wanted that I couldn't get.

Living in France as you are now, could you still make a film in England?

Yes, if the whole preparation and shooting time came within the number of days I'm allowed a year—about three months. So shooting would be possible. But, anyway, so many of my British films were made outside Britain: *Modesty Blaise*, *A Doll's House*, *Trotsky*, *Boom*. Now, those films were the exceptions I mentioned earlier, for they were American financed—through the accident of there being an enlightened man at Universal and through the accident of John Heyman's passionate devotion to me and his talent for salesmanship.

Tell me more about the producer John Heyman, since he seems to have been a very important figure in your life. When and how did you first get together?

It was about a year before *Boom*. There had been a lot of talk about our meeting, but it had never come off. Everyone was a little dubious as to how such a meeting would go. Finally, Robin Fox, a friend and at that time my agent, introduced us.

What had John Heyman done in the cinema before that?

Privilege, a bloody awful film I thought. He was in the process of making it then, and if I recall rightly, I was in the terribly embarrassing position just at the time we were beginning to function together of having to see and comment upon *Privilege*. I tried very hard to be positive, but I couldn't. He came over one Sunday, and we spent the whole day talking; we covered a lot of projects I was interested in. I loaded him down with books and scripts and he took them away and read them all. He is very scrupulous, and he reads very quickly. At least with me he does. So he came back and said I'm interested in this, that and the other. Nothing happened immediately, but some time later he asked what I would feel about doing *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More*, one of the projects I had been working on. 'With Elizabeth,' he added. I said, 'Christ, it's an old woman's part.' 'Does it have to be?' he replied. And I said, 'No, it doesn't have to be. It might be very interesting with a younger woman.' He was the Burtons' agent, and after he spoke to Elizabeth [Taylor], she got Richard involved. Much as I like Richard, and I do genuinely like him and think he is in many ways an extraordinary actor, I now feel he was a mistake for that particular project. But she wanted him involved, and that was that.

If I had thought it was a mistake at the



'Don Giovanni': José van Dam, Ruggero Raimondi

time, I wouldn't have done it, but I didn't realise it. It was a mistake, though, for a lot of reasons. In the process of making *Boom*, Elizabeth and I had more or less fallen in love with each other, and she said, 'You've got to do another picture with me. Haven't you got something?' And I said, 'Yes, I have: *Secret Ceremony*.' So that was how that went.

What, based on your experience of twenty years in England, is wrong with the British cinema? Is it one of those geographical accidents—that there just don't seem to be enough good directors born in Britain? Or is it something wrong with the system?

There is almost no way of answering that question without offending somebody, and I don't want to offend people who have been helpful to me. (I've been helpful to them, too, but that's another matter.) England has had its great films. I don't mean by that that there aren't going to be any more, but there have been great English films, there have been a few pretty extraordinary British directors and certainly plenty of fine film actors.

I think it's partly the American competition, but I also think that we are in a period of flux the world over, and Britain probably suffered more than any other country from World War II. What's happening to the film industry is what's happening to the whole British economy. And I don't see how you can separate one from the other.

I think Britain is getting into a situation where it isn't going to make a damn bit of difference whether it is run by Mrs. Thatcher or James Callaghan. Callaghan will have to pursue a conservative policy, and she will have to pursue a so-called socialist policy. And neither one makes any sense. In the meantime... People have always been irrational about the large sums of money they think are being made in films. Some people do make fortunes, but some people don't. The risks are immense, and unless you can spread your income over a period of years in some way (writers have the same problem), there is just no way of living under Britain's present tax laws. None at all. There is no way I could

pay what it costs me to live in order to work the way I do. Patricia [Losey] calculated that from her time with me—which is quite a long time now—I have worked on ten projects for each one that got made. That means, as in the case of *Voss*, several years work; as in the case of the Proust script, nine years; as in the case of *Galileo*, nearly thirty years; and as in the case of *The Go-Between*, nearly twenty years.

Twenty years!

Yes, I first became interested in it the year it was published, 1953. If you have to work that way and under some stress and tension, and if you are at all interested in preserving the right to say No, you have to be able to work out how the money from the year in which you earn what seems to be an inordinate amount can cover you for two or three years if necessary. But by Hollywood's or anyone else's standards, I never have made an inordinate amount of money.

Whatever happened to the *Magic Mountain* project, which you were involved with for some time?

Well, David Mercer wrote seven brilliant one-hour scripts. Nothing has happened at all with them. The original idea presented to me was to make seven hour-length films for television and then I could make a feature film out of the seven episodes. But Germany isn't interested in features. Almost all their money is tax-shelter, and that kind of money can be and usually is disaster for films because it means that a film is promptly sold to television without any theatrical distribution, as in the case of another John Heyman project, *A Doll's House*, a film I never would have been able to do without him. Tax-shelter people want a quick sale, a killing, and that means television.

But even John Heyman is no more able than anyone else to put together a really controversial film, like my project with Franz Salieri and his transvestite company [*Le Grand Eugène*] to do a half-million dollar

Television may never be the same again...

John Howkins

Antoine Lumière, who invented the cinematograph, was once asked by Georges Méliès, who used Lumière's machine to create the cinema as popular art, if he would sell all rights in his gadget. Lumière said no. It was only a passing amusement, he said, with no commercial future. Lumière's mistake was annoying for Méliès, but it probably had very little significance for the future of the cinema. Eighty years later, we have to judge the commercial and aesthetic potential of many more new inventions than Lumière and Méliès ever envisaged. And we do not have their leisure. The fertile soils of today's high technology, consumerist societies are being sown with the seeds of a profligate variety of new devices, systems and services. Each new idea, each new device, exploits several technologies and appears in several forms to generate new possibilities of making messages; of creating art; even of establishing new media.

The supply of media (film, TV) is already outstripping our consumption of its products. Films and programmes (and books) are being produced at a faster rate than our ability to buy and digest them. The gap in Japan is rated by a factor of four to five, according to the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, which has been conducting a census of information flow since 1973, and the figures are reckoned to be similar in the USA and Europe. The spread of new services has led some people to think that we have now come to the end in our conception of communication technologies. Everything is now possible, they say. Howard Steele, one-time Director of Engineering at the Independent Broadcasting Authority and now head of Sony Broadcast in Europe, claimed two years ago that, given time and money, the engineers could now do anything. The claim is false, of course. Our desires and expectations always move faster than our abilities to satisfy them; and we should be glad of that.

Yet at the end of the 70s we are witnessing the most tremendous innovation of prototypes and promises of new communication opportunities. Too many people are claiming

to have made better mousetraps; or even to be able to make money out of someone else's mousetrap. One leading company, which has been supplying information to the Post Office's Prestel system, is making more money talking about the future, when it will make even more money, than supplying information for the present.

Which of the numerous gadgets fighting for approval from the manufacturers, the regulatory agencies, the finance houses, the existing industries and the retail trade, as well as from the consumer, will succeed? And how will the shifts in media resources and opportunities affect the artist and producer, and the genres and formats that they and the public find most satisfying?

Nothing is so transient as a prototype. Many are called, few are chosen. Apart from anything else, societies cannot cope with more than one or two major new technological innovations in the same sector at the same time (the reasons range from the technical and industrial to the psychological). Yet it is likely that whatever range of new services is finally favoured, and whatever services provided, certain factors will be present.

First, the TV set will assimilate many of the functions and attributes of the computer. It will become more 'intelligent' or 'smart'. It will be bigger with, perhaps, a larger screen (Mitsubishi's 50-inch TV, launched in Britain in May, has astonishingly good picture qualities), or a flat screen, a different line/screen ratio, or 3-D (some fairly secret experiments have started in Australia and first reports are very promising). Its main attribute would be to take in more material and display it in many new ways.

The second factor, then, is just that increase in the number and variety of sources; both on-line and off-line. The on-line sources will be the over-the-air networks, based on terrestrial transmitters (as now), satellites and cable. Most major cities in the major TV countries now have three channels. Satellites and cable could quickly provide up to twelve; in the long term there will be many more. In the USA, six million households are already receiving TV by satellite (including three full channels of religious programmes, a 24-hour news service, and continuous coverage of the House of Representatives); tests are being carried out in Japan; and France and West Germany are on the brink of a decision. The USA, again, is leading in the exploitation of cable, although Canada has more subscribers (about 50 per cent). In the last few months, moreover, the bitter hostilities between the broadcasters and the cable operators have markedly lessened.

The main off-line source will be the video cassette and disc. The Japanese are the pioneers of cassettes, and production companies and libraries are flourishing. In the USA already one million players have been sold and distribution networks like Tape-to-Theatre and The Video Network are proving highly profitable. The Philips video disc (the world's second but technically the better) has been launched in Atlanta, though in minuscule quantities; but they may make an impact in five years or so. Video discs are a better bet for pre-recorded sources because they are likely to be one-third the cost of cassettes.

Third, the viewer will be able to store his own material. Cefax, Oracle (the BBC and IBA teletext systems) and the Post Office's Prestel can be stored on an ordinary audio cassette (allowing scoundrels to make bootleg copies of the news headlines or rather more substantial stuff like the *Financial Times* company analyses). TV and film material can be stored on video cassettes. And there's a possibility that future video discs will also be able to record as well as play back. The public is beginning to take charge. Each individual is becoming able to buy and sell, store and use, his own film and video materials.

How will these shifts in resources and power affect the artist? How will they alter the relationship between artist and audience? The questions involve both form and content. The new forms vary from new channels, which will function practically as new media, to smaller matters of presentation within a medium. The content of the new media, in turn, ranges from instructional texts (perhaps as support for traditional TV material) to video art to narrative. In each country the effects will be very different.

It is the form of the new media that has so far tended to dominate our expectations. Indeed, historically each new medium has been seen and understood solely as form, and celebrated for that, before the 'possibilities of

content' have been accepted (the phrase is Susan Sontag's in her book *On Photography*). Antoine Lumière saw his invention purely in formal terms; that was why he misunderstood it. To him, cinematography had no substance, no signification, no memory, no future. He advertised it simply as a 'scientific marvel'. Nowadays we watch TV pictures brought by satellite, which is a much greater scientific marvel, and think nothing of it. Indeed, we hardly think about the workings of TV at all. When the Arsenal football team, one Saturday in 1937, discovered that their match was to be televised live they clustered round the strange-looking camera like excited boys around a new toy. The photograph that recorded the occasion shows one player with his shirt inside-out—a startling contrast with today's football stars, who are blasé about the hardware but much concerned about how they perform and how they look (both on the field and in the studio).

It was the same with FM radio in the USA. Until 1967 most American stations transmitted identical services on both AM (medium wave) and FM (VHF). Then the federal regulatory agency ruled that all the major stations had to transmit separate services. Suddenly, a new form (format) was provided. The FM services were forced to have some entirely new content; the only constraint was that it should be different from the traditional services that were still being transmitted on AM. A few West Coast music producers and critics, who had hitherto regarded radio as too dull to be used, realised their opportunity and supplied the new form with the content that was to make it famous. By the early 70s it was FM radio, not television, (AM) radio or the movies which expressed America's new age.

One factor above all makes the new media different from today's dominant mass media. It is the extent to which they use money. The reasons why one new technology is accepted by a society, and another rejected, are not so much technological as financial. Television is about to depend upon the cash nexus.

The finances of television are doubly obscure. First, the cost of a TV service is generally assumed to be solely the cost of its production and distribution. Actually, the cost of reception (mainly the TV sets, bought or rented, but also the antenna, a licence, electricity and possibly a programme journal) far outweigh the broadcasters' costs. The broadcasters' budgets are better publicised; but the public pays three times as much. Second, over-the-air broadcasting is notoriously non-transactional, both in fact and in myth. The consumer does not pay according to the amount he or she watches (except for electricity). Instead, he or she pays a fixed capital cost or a series of rents which do not relate to the use of the set. In the UK, the cost of watching the BBC is understood to be £25, or whatever is the current licence fee, while the ITV service is supposed to be free ('It's good to be here on free TV!', said Bruce Forsyth in the first of London Weekend Television's *Bruce's Big Night*). In the USA, over-the-air TV is actually called free TV. The broadcasters cherish the title, for obvious reasons.

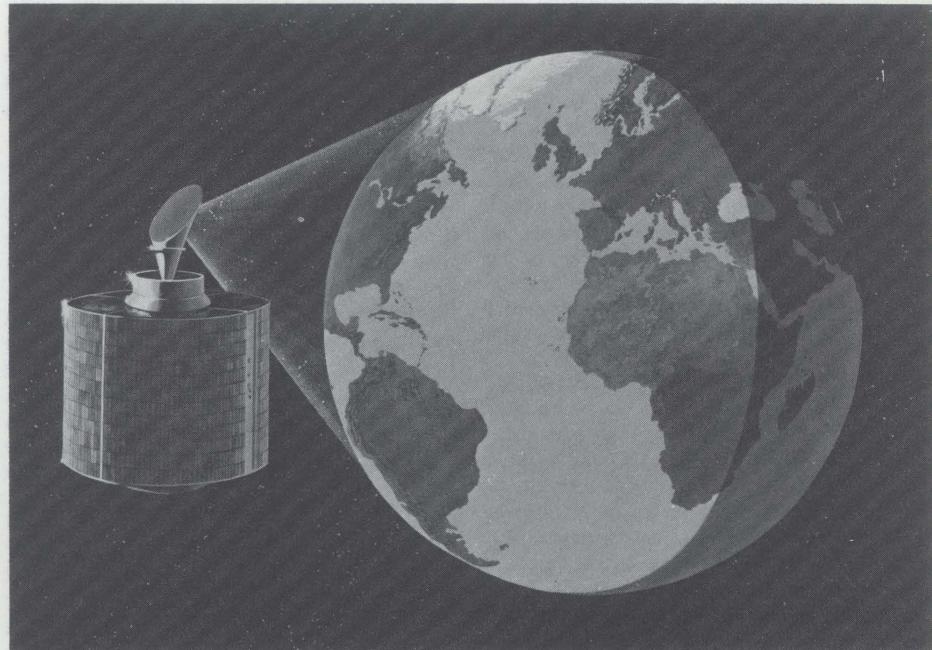
This primordial 'free-ness' will be profoundly altered by the new devices and services as they spread in competition with

over-the-air broadcasting. Many of the new services require exceptionally high capital costs that will not be taken for granted. Even more important, their use requires transactional costs (which are also high). Suddenly, people are being faced with the possibility of choice on a novel scale, and they are being asked to pay for it. (The Channel 4 Group, which has proposed a TV service in Britain financed largely by sponsorship and a more direct connection between advertising rates and audience, was moving explicitly towards the transactional mode.)

The introduction of payments into the television experience is the most radical and influential turn-around since the addition of the second channel (in any country); possibly since TV started. It is encouraging a totally

of the same material for each different arena. EMI's *The Deer Hunter*, Warner's *Superman* and other big-budget films have been prepared in as many as three different 35mm versions, as well as countless 16mm and 8mm versions, mainly for domestic projection. The soundtrack of *Star Wars* is even being used as the basis of a radio series which the BBC and US National Public Radio will transmit in early 1980.

The usual strategy is to prepare the most splendid version, with the best special effects and usually the longest print, for distribution to cinemas (with different prints possibly being distributed in different countries, or in the same country at different times). A second different version is prepared for over-the-air television, cut to fit, and made suitable for



Artist's impression of Intelsat III communications satellite. The light area shows the satellite coverage

new set of desires; opening whole new channels of distribution; permitting a much greater variation in technical standards within a single format and much greater diversity between forms. It is creating a new sector of entrepreneurial activity which will encompass all aspects of communications. It involves, at one boundary, the computer business (Prestel, video games); at others, the TV institutions, the national telecommunication authority (the telephone network), the entertainment business, and independent film companies. It serves the purposes of practically everything from education to gambling to surveillance.

The situation will change substantially once the multiple sources are operating, the multiple channels are open and the transactional nature of the new television is functioning. We may expect major shifts along two dimensions. The first concerns the existing film and TV industries, and is primarily a matter of production. The second concerns everyone, and is a matter of access.

The existing industries have a series of opportunities to produce new materials for new audiences. The first response to this multiplicity has been to duplicate existing material for the different outlets; the second, only slightly less frantic, to produce variations

family audiences. The third version, different again, will be destined for cable transmission (particularly Pay-TV) and will be reckoned to contain the maximum amount of the taboos of violence, sex and bad language. It is likely that each version will be distributed in sequence. In the USA, for instance, the Showtime Pay-TV company has approached RCA's video disc subsidiary to ask if the two companies could co-finance films which would be released first on RCA video disc, then on Showtime Pay-TV, and last on network television. The order follows the emerging pattern: from the smallest and richest audiences to the larger mass audience.

The next phase is the production of original material for each new outlet. So far, such material has been scarce, and ordinary. It consists largely of bland and monotonous displays of music, sport and sex. A few principles of presentation are evolving. For instance, VCL's cassette of Tina Turner doesn't have a presenter, because cassettes (and discs) must be repeatable, and presenters too soon become simply repetitive. The largest category of material in the existing cassette catalogues, and in MCA's disc catalogue, is the feature film.

The overlapping of media will blur the distinction between sources. We know when we are reading a book or at the theatre; and

we know the subtler difference between going to the cinema or watching TV. It's a bit harder, sometimes, to know whether, on TV, we are watching a feature film or a made-for-TV film. And it is virtually impossible to distinguish between a piece of film that was originally intended for Pay-TV and something that originated on disc. The different forms of video—a live relay by terrestrial network, a satellite relay, film, tape—are not obvious to the general audience. The amount of material made specially for the new media will probably be a small percentage of the whole, for quite some time. The bulk of material will be recycled (as made-for-cinema movies still outnumber made-for-TV movies on television).

Accountants in the film and TV businesses cannot forget their respective medium's financial constraints. In the traditional film business, they like to talk about gross receipts of a million or more (even if the majority of films never make that sum) and they are distinctly unhappy if anything less than a hundred thousand people are expected at the box office. Broadcasters think in different terms, but the results are much the same. They are reluctant to consider a programme that would cost over 1½ pence per viewer, or would attract either less than 5 per cent of the peak-time audience or less than the average for the time slot; in both cases, the numbers are counted in hundreds of thousands, at the least.

But the new media, combined with the new transactional modes, allow very different figures to be possible. The producer can charge and the consumer can pay sums which can support a much wider range of budgets and materials. The cost/consumer ratio is much more flexible. The effects will not be felt so much at the top of the scale (the \$40 million *Superman* and its ilk will continue) but at lower levels. Audiences that were not viable—and so were really invisible—suddenly become viable. The greater their enthusiasm for the product, if translated into economic terms, the smaller the audience may be. MCA are talking of ten thousand as an economic run on video disc; RCA are

ranging from ten thousand to thirty thousand. Both figures would be derisory in terms of films and broadcasting (and even illustrated books and magazines).

All these matters concern the existing film and TV industries. My second dimension concerns the rest of society (a rather larger group) and the ways in which they are beginning to exploit the new media. The new media are many-to-many where the traditional mass media are one-to-many. (If Jung was right to say that the cinema is an institution for working out private neuroses in public, then television allows the working out of public neuroses in private.) It will become possible for virtually any organisation (indeed, any individual) to exploit the new services and to reach its chosen audience without going through the existing institutions. Their performances and messages can be delivered direct to the audience. The most obvious result will be a huge increase in the number and kinds of organisation which produce audio-visual material.

Very many organisations, from the UK Football League to the US Kennedy Centre, Washington, which has just appointed a director of television, are beginning to realise that television and the adjacent new media provide wonderful opportunities for enlarging their audiences. Both are already using over-the-air broadcast television (with the Football League, in particular, becoming daily more aware of the monies to be made), and both are looking towards the time when their various performances can be put to earn more money from more audiences. The League, for instance, has a clear market for some of its games on US Pay-TV. The crucial point here is that these organisations, and any other, can make their own productions and establish a direct relationship with their audiences. Virtually every organisation which now exhibits or stages or performs something can expect to widen its audience via the new communications media; and the increasing transactionality of TV will enable such deals to be highly profitable.

This quantitative change will be accompanied by a qualitative change of equal significance. The most obvious improvement will be editorial freedom. The new media are permissive and liberal (and not only in their use to the pornographer, although both LWT's programme about television, *Look Here*, and the Video Disc 79 conference in London chose to demonstrate the opportunities inherent in the new media by showing *Deep Throat*). The furore over *Scum* as a TV programme (it was commissioned as a play by the BBC, who then refused to show it), its 'samizdat' showings on cassette, and its remaking as a film perfectly summarise the different attributes (and audiences) of each medium.

The new territory resembles some vast field of newly ploughed earth. A rich variety of seeds has been planted but nobody has kept a record, and nobody can envisage what the results may be. So far, only a few plants are showing. The only certain thing is that the new media will take very much longer to establish themselves than the enthusiasts keep on telling us. The longer, the better, surely. The controversy in the UK about the fourth terrestrial UHF channel, which started in 1971 and still continues, does not convince me of this country's ability to formulate

policy on tomorrow's far trickier matters either quickly or sensibly (and other countries are just as confused).

Within a few years Britain may have two more former VHF channels to allocate. Also, the government has already signed an agreement which gives the country five satellite TV channels, and we could well be technically able to use some of those channels by 1984. Yet we have hardly begun to plan whether or not we would like to do so. Few people in Westminster, Whitehall or anywhere else have begun to grasp these opportunities. The range of options is enormous. We could use the new channels for a national TV service, for regional services, a Ceefax/Oracle network, an independent teletext network, local radio, better mobile radio, Citizen's Band, and much else; and each could be run, like the fourth channel, in a multiplicity of ways. No country really knows how to cope with such a wealth of communication resources; let alone get it right in each particular case. We need to go slowly.

In the meantime there will be plenty of surprises. One of the oddest sights of the spring was Ted Turner (one of the USA's most aggressive money-makers and sometime competitor in the America's Cup), now owner of WTCG television station in Atlanta, in his battle to get his station accepted as a 'super station'. Ted Turner uses satellites to distribute his station's programmes to distant cable networks and thence to their audiences. Nobody is quite sure whether it is legal. To convince the federal authorities that super stations are a good thing, Turner is transmitting a TV schedule that starts with the BBC's *The Search for the Nile* (renamed *Discovery*) at 8.30 a.m. and continues with high culture until 10 p.m. when it has *The Ascent of Man*. Turner has also voluntarily decided to have 21 per cent less advertising than the national code requires; and no ads at all during children's programmes. The irony and surprise is that Turner, who avowedly wants to 'make more money than ABC, CBS and NBC combined', has to programme a schedule that will earn brownie points for culture but little else.

No medium is an island. Even in Lumière's day, when media were scarce (music, painting, drawing, sculpture; books, newspapers, gazettes; conversation and rumour), each new medium depended greatly upon the others. Today, we have so many media that the interrelationship between any two (say, between TV and the cinema) is a matter of continuous adjustment and anxiety. Neither artist nor audience seems in control. In the past, the artist generated both form and content of some media (the fine arts) while the society, as audience, initiated others (the mass circulation newspaper, the 'penny dreadful'). Nowadays, where artists have retained some sort of exclusivity, the audience is absent or uninterested (as in art video); and where the audience sets the pace (US network television) the artist feels ill at ease.

The quantum growth of the next decade, combined with the inexorable march towards transactionality, may exacerbate this split and also open a new split between the information rich and the information poor. We may witness great benefits for the few fortunate people—the educated, the wealthy, the highly employed—who are able to



Teletext: the Post Office's Prestel system



Teletext: the IBA's Oracle

THE MOVIE MAJORS

David Gordon

In 1973 David Gordon wrote an article for SIGHT AND SOUND called 'Why the Movie Majors are Major'. Recently, he prepared a paper on the same subject as background material for the Wilson Committee, of which he is a member. The paper, slightly shortened here, shows why and how the majors are still major.

The major American film distributors are at the crossroads of the film and television markets. They began to sell their films to television in a big way in the 1960s. Some of them, most notably Universal, seeing the television monster's avid appetite, began to feed it with made-for-television features, series and specials. They now tend to see themselves as purveyors of 'filmed entertainment'. In Britain, the independent television company run by Lord Grade, Associated Communications Corporation (formerly ATV), made the move in the other direction, from television to film production (hence the change in its name); in 1978 television accounted for 45 per cent of group turnover, films 23 per cent.

The big American film companies are all, now, extremely profitable and financially strong—in stark contrast to the difficulties of film companies in most other countries. To some extent their multi-national success has reduced the scope for native producers in other countries to survive. Given such a large home market, American film companies benefit from economies of scale that enable them to sell their films abroad at costs no higher than the less spectacular, less star-studded products of the native film industry.

The cause and effect of American cultural and economic dominance in film can be seen

in the figures for domestic and international film rentals. In most years, the leading American distributors receive almost half their theatrical film rental from abroad. Canada is the largest single market outside the United States (but to all intents and purposes is treated by the companies as part of their domestic market); no other market accounts for as much as 10 per cent of the foreign grosses (table 1). But looked at from the countries paying them, the rentals paid to the Americans account for very sizeable chunks of the distribution grosses generated in these countries. Unfortunately, reliable figures exist for only relatively few countries (table 2).

Adding to the overseas and home rental receipts the sales of feature films to television, the American majors' annual turnover from feature films came to about \$2 billion in 1977. Films are yielding them some handsome profits (table 3). They have all now recovered from the huge write-offs of the early 70s that followed the excessive production boom of the late 60s. Very roughly, a film needs to gross about twice its investment (production costs plus pre-release publicity) before the distributor/financier breaks even. Total film revenues were then running at under \$1 billion, but the companies had about the same amount invested; i.e. about twice as much as was prudent.

The managements suffered for their sins. The conglomerates bought in or new managements were moved in by irate shareholders. In 1965 Paramount was bought by Gulf and Western. In 1968 United Artists was bought by Transamerica Corporation. In 1969 Warner Brothers was bought by Kinney Services (renamed Warner Communications in 1971). In 1969 control of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer passed to Mr. Kirk Kerkorian, who took the company out of distribution (though remaining in production) and into hotels and gambling. Columbia's management was reshuffled in 1970 (and again in 1978, but after it had returned to profitability). 20th Century-Fox ejected the flamboyant Mr. Darryl F. Zanuck in 1971, and, having gradually reduced its debt, found true profit in *Star Wars*; it is now busy diversifying. The well-managed duo of Universal (the largest

TABLE 2. PROPORTION OF DISTRIBUTORS GROSS IN RESPECT OF AMERICAN FILMS

	%
Britain	1977
Germany	1976
Japan	1977
France	1977
Italy	1976

division of MCA) and Walt Disney Productions (where film and television are now dwarfed by Disneyland and Walt Disney World) alone survived without management upheavals.

It is worthy of note that the film industry is now one of the older American industries, and that these film companies are among the veterans of American business: they are all fifty or more years old. It is also worthy of note that no other companies have broken into the market in a big way. The existing movie majors seem to have found some magic elixir of survival.

The elixir is to have reached a certain critical mass in their dual and linked roles of distributor and financier. A profitable film company needs to diversify its risks by backing a programme of films; but it can only generate the resources and confidence to do so out of the cash flow from distributing a large number of films a year. It can only distribute a large number of films a year if it has an efficient domestic and international sales network. Once possessed of such, the films it finances, or buys in, can be given a much harder push than films distributed by smaller fry. Each year hundreds of films are released in the United States. With few exceptions, only those distributed by the majors have a chance of success. The market strength of the majors is such that in 1977 they accounted for 93 per cent of American distributors' gross in the United States and in Canada (table 4). The smaller film distributors—the hundreds of them that operate nationally or in states—shared the other meagre 7 per cent. (Since they are presumably less bothered about reporting their grosses to *Variety*, source of these

TABLE 1. DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL RENTALS OF MAJOR AMERICAN FILM DISTRIBUTORS* IN 1977

	%	%	\$m	\$m
DOMESTIC	59	—	—	862
INTERNATIONAL				
Canada	11	64	—	—
West Germany	9	52	—	—
Japan	8	50	—	—
France	7	46	—	—
Italy	6	40	—	—
Britain	6	36	—	—
Spain	5	29	—	—
Australia	5	26	—	—
Brazil	4	21	—	—
Mexico	3	17	—	—
TEN LARGEST MARKETS	26	64	381	—
OTHER COUNTRIES	15	36	219†	—
TOTAL OVERSEAS RENTALS	—	100	—	600
TOTAL	100	—	—	1462

* Members of the Motion Picture Association of America with the addition of Walt Disney Productions.

† Including \$36m from Disney which has not been broken down by territory.

Source: *Variety*, company accounts.

TABLE 3. THE PROFIT IN FILMED ENTERTAINMENT, 1977 (\$m)

Revenues	Columbia	MGM	Paramount	Twentieth Century	United Artists	Universal	Warner	Walt Disney	Total
Domestic theatrical									
Foreign theatrical	153	107	150	209	318	223	150	59	
Other				89			81	37	
Total	153	107	150	298	318	223	254	96	1599
Films sold to TV	25			23	60		40		
Television series	80	28	82	48		289	60	23	
Total	105	28	82	71	60	289	100	23	758
Other	40(a)		238(b)		96(c)	49			423
Total	298	135	470	369	474	561	354	119	2780
Profit (operating)	31	22	36	70	67	107	58	50	441
Profit as % of turnover	10	16	8	19	14	19	16	42	16

Note: Profit before interest, taxes and unallocated corporate costs

(a) Television commercials and video service. (b) Cinemas abroad and books. (c) Records.

figures, it is possible that the share of the smaller distributors is in fact higher.)

The market strength of the majors, and the cash flow that accompanies it, makes them the natural providers of equity finance for the making of films. Much has been made of the rise of the independent production companies that took over from the assembly-line studios during the 50s. It is true that detailed creative control over scripts, stars and material passed from studio heads to independent producers, promoters and packagers. But this did not change the fundamental economics of production: the big companies have remained the first source of finance for independent producers. Necessarily so. The major distributors are placed to set the losses of the inevitable flops against the profits of the inevitable successes. (A fact of film life which producers—of successful films—rarely grasp.)

Inevitable successes, that is, provided the company has a large enough number of films in its risk portfolio of investment; and provided it has the skills of selection. Gamblers in a sense they are. In order to make any real money, their films must be in the top dozen or so. The tendency for the hits to scoop the pool (table 5) has reached the

point where, in 1977, the top six films accounted for a third of the U.S. and Canada gross; the top 13 accounted for half; only the top 38 films grossed over \$10m—and they accounted for three-quarters of the total revenue. The hundred and more other films released had to scramble for the remaining \$300m or so. But gamblers in a sense they are not. Each of the seven largest majors has hit the jackpot at least once during the past nine years.* In the four-year period to December 1977, Columbia Pictures released 92 films: 62 made a profit (on average a 'gross profit' [undefined] of \$2.8m a film) and 30 made a loss (an average of \$755,000).†

The record of companies that tried to muscle in on the majors is discouraging. In the early 70s, the television networks set up their own film production companies in Hollywood, on the grounds that these films would get their costs back in cinemas and then come free to television. These new-

comers were of sufficient scale to back a large programme of films, and they made an impact on the market (the percentage of the market taken by 'others' in table 4 rose between 1970 and 1973 due to them). But they did not have the expertise to keep to budgets and they did not distribute the films themselves but allowed other companies to do so for them. After a few years, they retreated, leaving the field to the majors once again. The only company that successfully produces without itself distributing is MGM, which has its films distributed in the United States by United Artists and elsewhere by Cinema International Corporation (owned by Paramount and Universal). MGM is charged a low distribution fee, retains a measure of control over how distribution is handled, and retains a feel for films. It also has the cushion of a film library whose value keeps on growing.

The majors have the strength in the domestic markets and they still retain a formidable presence in foreign markets: they have slimmed and merged their overseas offices (which they are unable to do for antitrust reasons at home). Cinema International Corporation claims to have about a third of the American overseas market and in the year to June 1977, had a turnover of

* In the last five years, *Star Wars* (Fox), *Jaws* (Universal), *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease* (Paramount), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Columbia), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Rocky* (United Artists), *The Exorcist* (Warners).

† Columbia Pictures' presentation to security analysts, February, 1978.

TABLE 4. MAJOR AMERICAN DISTRIBUTORS' DOMESTIC MARKET SHARES
(PERCENTAGE OF RENTALS IN U.S. AND CANADA, AS REPORTED TO VARIETY)

	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
American International	na	na	na	na	3.8	3.4	3.8	3.4	1.4
Buena Vista (Disney)	9.1	8.0	5.0	6.5	7.0	6.0	6.7	5.6	4.8
Columbia	14.1	10.2	9.1	7.0	7.0	13.1	8.3	11.5	11.6
MGM *	3.4	9.3	6.0	4.6	—	—	—	—	—
Paramount	11.8	17.0	21.6	8.6	10.0	11.3	9.6	10.0	23.8
Twentieth Century	19.4	11.5	9.1	18.8	10.9	14.0†	13.4	19.5	13.4
United Artists*	8.7	7.4	15.0	10.7	8.5	10.7	16.2	17.8	10.3
Universal	13.1	5.2	5.0	10.0	18.6	25.1	13.0	11.5	16.8
Warner Bros	5.3	9.3	17.6	16.4	23.2	9.1†	18.0	13.7	13.2
All others	15.3	22.1	11.6	17.4	11.0	7.3	11.0	7.0	4.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

* From 1974 MGM films were distributed in the U.S. and Canada by United Artists.

† All rentals from *Towering Inferno*, a joint Twentieth Century-Fox and Warner Production, credited to Fox.

TABLE 5. ANALYSIS OF FILM GROSSES IN THE UNITED STATES DOMESTIC MARKET IN 1977

Distributors' gross	\$m	% of total
Over \$100m Star Wars (20th Century-Fox)	127	13.3
\$30m-\$99m Rocky (United Artists) Smoky and the Bandit (Universal) A Star is Born (Warner) King Kong (Paramount) The Deep (Columbia)	54 40 37 36 31	
Cumulative total	198	325
\$20m-\$29.9m Silver Streak (20th Century-Fox) The Enforcer (Warner) Close Encounters (Columbia) In Search of Noah's Ark (Sunn) The Spy Who Loved Me (United Artists) Oh, God! (Warner) A Bridge Too Far (United Artists)	27 24 23 23 22 21 21	34.2
Cumulative total	161	486
\$10m-\$19.9m (15 films)	212	51.2
Cumulative total	698	73.5
\$1m-\$9.9m (91 films)	291	
Cumulative total	989	100.0

Source: Analysis of Variety's list of film earnings over \$1m in the U.S. and Canada in 1977. Figures for the U.S. and Canada, but note that distributors exaggerate the figures they report to Variety: the total of \$989m is larger than the known size of the U.S. and Canadian market—before including the earnings of films that grossed under \$1m.

\$150m. United Artists and 20th Century-Fox have kept their overseas network, Columbia and Warners have merged theirs (and, in Britain, have merged the combined operation with EMI). The policy of the majors has been to get their overseas offices to concentrate more than in the past on selling the programme of releases selected by head office, rather than to pick up local product.

In early 1978, Mr. Alan Hirschfield, then president of Columbia Pictures Industries, in a talk to Wall Street security analysts, gave the figuring for a typical Columbia project.

	\$m
Cash negative cost	5.6
Less: outside finance	2.0
Plus: initial releasing costs	3.6
Cash break-even point	3.0
Network television	6.6
Syndication	2.3
Pay-television and other	0.6
Net to be cleared from cinemas	3.5
Minimum sales target	3.1
	6.6

Several points are worth noting. (1) Releasing costs—largely the national advertising to launch the film—are set at half the production costs. Pressure to assure a film a place in the top 20 has led to larger and larger advertising budgets. (2) If outside finance is used, the cash break-even point can be substantially reduced. However, once a film passes break-even, the profits have to be shared with the outside investors. Columbia, which was strapped for cash a few years ago, has used outside finance more than any other

major. (3) From the presentation of the figures, it would appear that sales to television of \$3.5m are regarded as more certain than the income from cinemas, which is regarded almost as a residual. (4) To clear \$3.1m from cinemas would need a world-wide box-office gross of only \$10m or so.

Mr. Hirschfield was trying to persuade the Wall Street community that much of the risk had been taken out of films, and hence his presentation may have been a little rosy. But from this brief study of the role and finances of the majors, it would seem that the segment of the film industry controlled by the American majors is indeed more profitable and less risky than is popularly thought. (Risk has not been taken out of the life of the film executive, however; Mr. Hirschfield was deposed as president of Columbia in July 1978.)

The marketing and financial strength of the American film companies derives from the size of their domestic cinema and television markets, which gives them economies of scale enabling them to penetrate the markets of other countries. But the domestic American market remains the preserve of American films; foreign films get a very few percentage points of the total gross, and fetch smaller amounts of money from licence deals with American television than American films. Thus the total market as perceived by an executive of an American film company is much bigger than the market as seen by an Australian, Canadian or European film executive. This enables the Americans to think and finance 'big', and in the era of the small screen, bigness itself exerts a pull on the inert millions glued to their small screens. Those engaged in film production in smaller markets like Britain can never forget that the Americans have a natural lead. ■

The Reluctant Exile from page 147

picture called *The Watergate Buggers*. Remember, Mr. Nixon was still in office. John told me he could get it financed over the weekend, but everyone was afraid to do it. They all thought it would make money, and most of them were in sympathy with what it would obviously have said, but they were all afraid of retaliation. So it was never made.

Did it ever bother you that although you were living and working in England, the British gave you less recognition than the French? Ordinary people, even—I mean people not in the film business.

That isn't strictly true. Of course, the customs men in France know who I am, and the taxi drivers, and the delicatessen man. The fact of the matter is that France is a country where people still go to the cinema. In every class. And I suppose it relates to the well-known fact that the French live on the sidewalks. They don't stay at home very much. They go to cafés; they go to restaurants; and they go to the cinema. And their passion for the cinema is also part of the whole French culture myth. When I say 'myth' I don't mean to say that they don't have a real culture, but . . .

In England, after all, I didn't get less attention than other directors. I don't know any film director in Britain who is all that well known as a personality. Italy is more like France in that respect. There was a series of eight of my films on Italian television last year. I introduced each of the films on TV and after that I was well known in Italy, although not to the same degree as in France. But time also runs out on you in France, and once you have got to a certain point, it's time to go. The tide can turn the other way!

I would like to return to England, and I'm doing everything I can to make it possible. There have been some slight changes in the tax laws, but at the moment it's still not possible. And I'm not talking about squirreling away a lot of money. I'm talking about making enough money to meet my obligations and to live in the way I must to maintain the tensions and the steam that gets anything done at all.

I get awfully discouraging reports from London. We adore the house we have in spite of the fact that it has been burgled twice since we left, which is a nasty feeling. But very soon now, unless a solution is found that makes it practical or unless we know where we, where I, want to spend the rest of my life, I'll have to sell the house. I lose money on it every day. No, in my career which now comprises thirty films, I haven't any real reserves at all. Most of the family has been adequately cared for and adequately educated in one way or another—four children, off and on; and four wives, off and on!

One of whom was English?

Two of whom are English. One of my sons lives there all the time. I have two English grandsons. I have one son who is completely English—he's hardly ever been to the States. The taxes in Britain are heavy, the upkeep is heavy, and the money that is brought in to pay for it is taxable if I am there at the time. But I don't know where else to go. I don't like Paris any more. ■

In The Picture

Budapest Film Week

The annual Hungarian film week, alternating between Budapest and Pécs, is a unique event in the festival calendar. One hundred international critics are invited to view the entire national production of the past year. It is in itself a singular tribute to the Hungarian cinema that this can be done fearlessly (on the part of the hosts) and painlessly (for the guests): only imagine being asked to sit through a whole year's production from Britain or East Germany.

The showpiece of the year—and indeed Hungary's most costly film ever—was Miklós Jancsó's huge historical trilogy *Vitam et Sanguinem*, or at least the first two parts of it, *Hungarian Rhapsody* and *Allegro Barbaro*. The two films are the official Hungarian entry at Cannes. It is enough to say here that Jancsó's impressionist reconstruction of the life and times of Bajcsy-Zsilinsky, a controversial figure of the years between the start of the century and the end of the Second World War, is visually his most spectacular film to date, a veritable passion of horses and fireworks and naked girls and soldiers and funerals and fires. Sometimes inevitably you are forced to wonder if all the dazzling images and mystifying texts (by Gyula Hernádi, Jancsó's regular Hungarian scenario collaborator) are not deliberate distractions from the equivocal historical role of the real-life original of the hero.

The most striking work to emerge from the Budapest week was *The Good Neighbour*, co-scripted and directed by Zsolt Kezdi-Kovács, best known to London for *When Joseph Returns*. A tenement cellar—once a bordello—is a microcosmic social organisation. Deprivation of one kind or another makes all the denizens easy prey for an opportunist (László Szabó) who moves in on them, skilfully manipulating everyone for his own ultimate ends. It is a clever, ironic, witty and original film and clearly confirms Kezdi-Kovács as one of the most gifted directors now working in Hungary.

Pál Sándor, director of *Improperly Dressed*, deals with human breakdown under the stresses of war in *Deliver Us from Evil*—a tragicomedy about a group of ruinous people scurrying round a death-haunted Budapest at the end of 1944, in search of a lost overcoat. The film

is a new demonstration of the remarkable camerawork of Elemér Ragályi. Ragályi appears again as cameraman on János Róza's *The Trumpeter*, a fiercely anti-romantic and realistic portrayal of a brutal period of Hungarian history, the first years of Austrian domination at the close of the seventeenth century. Ragályi, now perhaps the most gifted of a notable generation of Hungarian cameramen, is a particular genius of the hand-held camera. In *The Trumpeter* he manages to combine all the freedom of hand-holding with a technical correctness which could not be improved by the most sophisticated mechanical supports.

Generally the year's crop of new films showed a movement away from the traditional concern with history, though one of the best films on show, Pál Gábor's *Vera's Training*, is a critical analysis of the mechanisms of Hungary's Stalinist era. The naive, well-meaning and impressionable heroine is clay for the hard-line dogmatists of the period to form in their own moulds. The film is a political horror story of the corruption of a human being.

Last year's film week already revealed a significant reaction from the theatrical tradition of Hungarian

film acting, as more directors—in the wake of István Dárdy—experimented with non-professional actors in preference to professionals who are likely to be readying themselves for the night's stage performance before they have recovered from the exhaustion of the last one. The trend continues: the best of the new batch is Béla Tarr's *Family Nest*, an appropriately claustrophobic study, in *cinéma vérité* style, of an over-size family crammed into a tiny flat, and the consequent tensions and breakdowns.

The best realist film made in Hungary—and for that matter anywhere else in Europe—in recent years remains *A Quite Ordinary Life*, directed by Imre Gyöngyössy and Barna Kabay. Made for West German television a couple of years ago, it is wholly Hungarian in theme and spirit; and was included alongside the technically more native production in this year's film week. Lovingly and frankly the filmmakers observe an aged peasant woman, living a timeless but vanishing mode of life, in a village of old women who have been robbed of their menfolk by a violent century of history. The old woman, shinning up her apple trees, heaving sacks of potatoes, tilling her land, weaving, setting off on a journey to London to see her only son—an enterprise as unknown and daring for her as a trip to the moon—has the heroism of a Rembrandt subject. The mystery of this great film is why British television has so consistently resisted buying it.

DAVID ROBINSON

Cinema Italian-style

Not since Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon* has there been quite such a ruthless debunking of the cinema myth as is to be found in *La Macchina Cinema*, a five part TV series, over four hours of screen time, which RAI transmitted last winter.

'The Good Neighbour', directed by Zsolt Kezdi-Kovács



The authors of this merciless attack on their own breadwinning profession are a team headed by director Marco Bellocchio and his long-time editor Silvano Agosti. The other two members of the team, recruited from the ranks of film intellectuals, are Sandro Petraglia and Stefano Rulli, who both worked on Bellocchio's *Seagull*. The group had already worked together in 1974 on a four-hour record of life in Italian mental hospitals, first shown in its rather overwhelming entirety, but later cut down to a much more digestible two-hour version which, under the title *Matti da slegare*, has been widely shown, even on television itself.

Their recent undertaking suffers from the same prolixity, but the material is equally spellbinding. One suspects the makers have been conditioned by television time requirements: each of the five episodes lasted fifty minutes, which was about twenty minutes too long for the material available. The presence on the team of an editor as experienced as Agosti (who incidentally has not been so successful under his own steam as a director) leads one to hope that an effort will now be made to produce a more accessible version.

What Bellocchio and friends seemed to be doing in this love-hate look at how Italians have caught the 'movie bug' is to say, 'We are all victims of the cinema, like it or not.' Their impudent camera eye intrudes on the people who make movies, whether they are famous like Marco Ferreri (shown getting angry with the fire department while setting fire to Gérard Depardieu and waxworks in the final sequence of *Bye, Bye, Monkey*) or totally unknown like a young provincial named Tony De Bonis, who filled out the first instalment. The cruellest moments, however, come in the final episode when the authors interview the forgotten pin-up beauty of the early 60s, Daniela Rocca, who won fame as Mastroianni's moustachioed wife

in *Divorce—Italian Style*. Rocca's story is heart-rending even if typical in movie history. She tells how she was 'used' by an Italian producer of the time and by the director of *Divorce—Italian Style*, Pietro Germi. At one of those ghastly Hollywood-on-the-Tiber galas at which everyone from clapper boys to starlets are given prizes for 'A Life in the Cinema', Daniela sits with a few women friends watching the stars glorying in their fame and riches (and never so much as throwing a 'Ciao' in her direction, or anyway not in front of Bellocchio's unkind camera).

How far the material has been manipulated it is difficult to tell, but the basic facts as they are shown are true. The Tony De Bonis of the first episode is an ex-boxer who organises home movie 'festivals' in his home town. Bellocchio shows us one of his prize-giving ceremonies and also shows one of De Bonis' films being immortalised on Super-8. A young man who took part in the filming explained to me how Bellocchio 'organised' for his own convenience the events in this episode. But that doesn't make them any the less real. This is in the best tradition of Italian realist film-making: the recreation of reality using the real people and events. Bellocchio doesn't hesitate to use people from his own professional experience. We are shown the disillusionment of a boy who played a small role in *In the Name of the Father*, and there is the rather pathetic film test which Tina Aumont did for him when she hoped he would cast her as Nina in *The Seagull*. Interviewed by the *Macchina Cinema* team, Tina admits that she needs films 'more than a man or a child'.

And that's really what this series is all about. It shows Italians for whom films are not so much a profession or hobby as a reason for living. We see a young man in Rome who makes poetic experimental films and has transformed his bathroom into a lab and his bedroom into a studio, but keeps his films to himself as if they were secret diaries. We are introduced to various other movie-bitten fanatics who, unlike that young man, have taken the risk of coming out of the movie closet and have been burned. There is a railwayman who invested all his savings in opening a film club which nobody wanted to join. We meet a young woman who for years has laboured as a film extra; but after playing a series of victims of Nazi tortures in the pornographic genre, she got a job in a hotel and tells Bellocchio frankly, 'It is far less humiliating to work as a hotel maid than it was to be an extra in films.'

Then there is the episode almost entirely dedicated to the making of soft porn movies in the provinces. I had my doubts about the authenticity of these incredible scenes (with tests of aspiring players in which the girls and boys have to show their genitals), but I soon had proof that Bellocchio and Co. were not faking. I happened by chance on a wet evening in a Tuscan provincial city to venture into a cinema showing a film called *Compagne Nudes*. It turned out to be produced by a group calling itself 'Italian Centre for Cultural Action'. Though the movie did not



Lotte Reiniger at work on her National Film Board film '*Aucassin and Nicolette*'

really qualify even as soft porn (in spite of the inevitable simulated intercourse), it was clear that the authors believed they were making an 'artistic' film. I seemed to recognise all the people from Bellocchio's series, or their stereotypes. The only revelation was that such a film could be shown publicly and that the handful of us who sat through it to the end didn't even ask for our money back. How could we? We too were victims of the cruel *macchina cinema*.

JOHN FRANCIS LANE

Lotte Reiniger at 80

One of the *grandes dames* of cinema, Berlin-born silhouette film-maker Lotte Reiniger, celebrated her 80th birthday on June 2nd. Miss Reiniger, who has had her studio in North London since the 50s, made her first film, *The Ornament of the Enamoured Heart*, in Berlin in 1919. Her latest film, *The Rose and the Ring*, was made in Montreal only last year. Screenings of both films were planned as part of her birthday celebrations in Munich, where a huge retrospective exhibition of her work opened on her birthday. The organisers even transported her trick table (animation bench) from London to Munich, along with boxes of silhouette cuttings.

One of the last survivors of the golden age of German cinema in the 1920s, Miss Reiniger achieved a kind of immortality in the film history books when she made the cinema's first full-length animated film, *The Adventures of Prince Achmet* (1923-26), before Mickey Mouse was even a squeak on the Disney drawing board. Her collaborators on the film were Bertold Bartosch and Walter Ruttmann. For a time in the 20s she worked with Fritz Lang on a

sequence for *Die Nibelungen*. She got her first job in films in 1918 from Paul Wegener, cutting out the titles for his *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, in which she also helped to animate wooden rats after live ones had refused to co-operate.

Apart from *Prince Achmet*, Lotte Reiniger has made some sixty silhouette films in as many years. Her eyes, her imaginative genius and a pair of scissors are all she needs. The exquisite detail of design and the marvellous marriage of music and movement show that time has not robbed her of the skill she displays in her silhouette art. But time is slowing her down and she gets impatient. These days she is reluctant to give way to the nuisances that the years bring. She remonstrates with her feet when they refuse to walk far or fast. She still diets by eating off small plates. She likes to pretend. It's part of her private make-believe world, and it's that quality of childlike innocence and wonderment which illuminates her films. She is a self-confessed 'well-upholstered old trumper'. But Jean Renoir, who knew her well, provided another description of her. 'What do you say,' he said, 'if you find yourself suddenly in the presence of Mozart? Especially if this Mozart is a disarming woman, slightly plump and chats like a magpie...' Of her film technique he said: 'She was born with fairy hands.'

Lotte Reiniger and her late husband, Carl Koch, first met Renoir at the Paris première of *Prince Achmet* in 1926. They remained friends for life. Koch collaborated with Renoir on *La Grande Illusion* and *La Régule du Jeu* and went on to direct *La Tosca*, the film which Renoir prepared and abandoned in Italy. When Koch died in 1963, Lotte Reiniger retreated into obscurity for some years. But then she wrote a book,

Shadow Theatres and Shadow Films, was invited back to Berlin to lecture and see an exhibition of her work at the Deutsche Kinemathek, and even saved her local film society at Barnet, of which she is president, with a timely donation. In 1972, at the Berlin Film Festival, she was honoured 'for her exceptional work for the cinema'.

In 1974 she made a coast to coast lecture tour of North America. In Montreal she was invited back to make her first film for 12 years, *Aucassin and Nicolette*. This 16-minute cartoon of a thirteenth century love ballad was made at the National Film Board of Canada, where Miss Reiniger renewed an old friendship with Norman McLaren, with whom she had worked at the GPO Film Unit in London in the 30s. Nearly half a century later, Lotte Reiniger's 80th birthday tributes may at last bring her adopted country into line with those countries which have long since recognised her as an animator extraordinary.

PAUL GELDER

Eastern Approaches

'The Grand' is an old-fashioned 30s picture palace built on a large scale. It's fairly dilapidated now, and the gilt trimmings have long since disappeared. In fact, the Grand is precisely the kind of cinema that is everywhere either being demolished or tripled. However, this particular venue isn't at risk because at 11 o'clock in the morning on a weekday it is packed to capacity for its second screening of the day. An audience of over 2,000 people waits tensely and noisily for the film to begin. Before it does two slides are flashed on the screen: one requests the audience to keep quiet during the performance, the other informs them which projectionists

are screening the film in case presentation doesn't come up to standard. Information over, the audience sits back to enjoy this week's film—Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet*.

A thirty-year-old movie gripping a huge audience early in the morning may be a fantasy to most distributors, but the 'Grand', for all its faded European splendour, isn't a cinema known by many distributors simply because of its location—it's the largest cinema in Shanghai. Only in the last eighteen months have foreign films begun to reach Chinese screens, after an absence of many years. To most Western filmgoers the selection of Western films may seem a trifle odd: Chaplin films and adaptations of classics like *Hamlet* are predictable enough—they don't deal with the modern Western world—but Chinese audiences have also been delighted by a series of modern Japanese movies, which reputedly attracted all-night queues in Beijing [Peking], and more surprisingly by *Futureworld* and Sam Peckinpah's *Convoy*.

Peckinpah's film was cut before distribution, but it's still difficult to imagine how a mass Chinese audience reacted to the concept of citizen's band radio, although the technical effects and car stunts were evidently well received. The importation of *Convoy* illustrates what has, till now, been one of the difficulties of the hard-working staff of the China Film Corporation—that most American distributors have been unable to consider selling films until the normalisation of diplomatic relations between China and the USA, and that many American distributors seem unwilling to accept that when the average admission price is the equivalent of ten pence large sales prices are out of the question.

Along with their rediscovery of Western films, Chinese audiences are also being given the opportunity to re-view their own cinematic heritage. Most of the films made between liberation in 1949 and the Cultural Revolution in the mid-60s completely disappeared from cinemas for thirteen years and were replaced by the 'model revolutionary works' beloved by the Gang of Four. It is these films which most Westerners who have seen any Chinese films identify as 'Chinese' cinema; but as a representative sample they couldn't be more misleading. Filmed within strictly laid down cinematic and formal conventions—the 'three outstandings': the revolutionary hero seen in large and brightly lit close-up, the counter-revolutionary small in dark long-shot—these films misrepresented China's sophisticated and subtle film heritage. Their one simple rhetorical and naive statement (and form) not only betrayed a continuity of work stretching from the 30s to the 60s but also simplified the Chinese Revolution into a black and white absurdity. Films made before the Cultural Revolution demonstrate that Chinese film-makers had successfully absorbed all the stylistic characteristics of Western cinema and used them to create an indigenous narrative cinema which retains both a national and political identity. The pre-Cultural Revolu-

tion cinema tackled the difficulties of revolution in a way that permitted a complexity of characterisation which later completely disappeared.

The task which now faces the Chinese film industry is massive: to rebuild a national cinema after a 13-year hiatus of genuinely creative work. The problem is compounded by two factors. Many of the older, experienced film-makers suffered badly in the Cultural Revolution—some died, others are too ill, or too old, to contribute more than advice; while the young generation of film-makers have made and seen films in a cultural vacuum for most of their lives, divorced from outside influence and deprived of access to their own traditions. Enthusiasm for a new beginning is tempered by a recognition that it may not be a quick process.

Now that the national film school in Beijing has reopened, good teaching can make a significant contribution, but perhaps the most important factor in the redevelopment of China's cinema will be the influence of the newly re-released films. It is to be hoped that the new generation of Chinese film-makers will look more to their own history for inspiration and less to the commercial films of the West. If they can successfully achieve a synthesis, taking only what they need from Western cinema, then the films which will be produced in the future will not only satisfy Chinese audiences, they could also hold a few revelations for audiences elsewhere.

SCOTT MEEK

Signs of a changing film scene: vintage film star photographs like these have recently been put on public sale in China



Panafrican Festival

The Sixth Festival Panafricain du Cinéma de Ouagadougou (FESPACO) was held in February in Upper Volta. Organised by the local Ministry of Information, this year's festival was in homage to Ousmane Sembene, who received a standing ovation on the opening night and whose latest film, *Ceddo* (which will shortly be in distribution in Britain through The Other Cinema), opened the festival.

In Britain, African cinema tends to mean Sembene and Senegal; Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian films we think of more in terms of (North African) Arab cinema, along with those from Egypt. Yet strictly speaking, of course, all these countries are in Africa; and in the countries south of the Sahara, too, there are major cultural as well as political differences. How then to define 'African cinema'? Crudely, it could be said that part of the French legacy seems to have been a passion for cinema and strong surviving French influence, while Anglophone African countries appear to be more interested in the use of film, largely as an audio-visual aid in 'communication'. This festival's language is French.

But though English and French may be official languages, many African films are made in the language most people speak within a country: *Ceddo* is in Woloff; *Baara*, by Souleymane Cissé of Mali, is in Bambara; North African films are in Arabic. (This proved a small problem for Jacques Champreux, who directed *Bako* in French and did not understand the local language of the film's dialogue.) Language is thus one of the blocks to the wide distribution of African films, which often need to be dubbed or subtitled for showing in other African countries, in a number of different languages or—more likely—in English or French.

A second factor hindering distribution is that until this year there has been little collective organisation within Africa against the monopoly on distribution and exhibition circuits of major European and American companies acting through agencies. These agencies generally distribute second-rate movies and tend not to distribute African films. Upper Volta, Senegal and Tanzania have all at different times refused this imposition of choice by, for example, closing or nationalising cinemas. But since there are not enough African films to meet the demand, such moves against outside control of exhibition can be met by reciprocal non-cooperation from the distributors. Now 14 countries have signed an agreement for inter-state cooperation in distribution through the Consortium Interafriqueen de Distribution Cinématographique (CIDC).

This is a move which the Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes (FEPACI) has been proposing for some time. FEPACI works to a charter agreed at its 2nd Congress, held in Algiers in 1975. The charter outlines the aims of its members to work against the effects of neo-colonialism in politics, economics

and culture. The main function of FEPACI is as a protective pressure group for African film-makers, which means in part supporting their independence from political pressure.

A festival film from Gabon raised questions about this idea of cultural independence. *Demain, un nouveau jour*, directed by Pierre-Marie Dong, is a relatively high budget film of the autobiography of President Bongo, who takes a personal interest in his country's film industry. Férid Boughedir described it in *Jeune Afrique* as being 'The first time in the history of cinema that a film produced by a President of the Republic and devoted to himself is a work of fiction made like the most passionate Western!' The film's characterisation and style are reminiscent of some of Sidney Poitier's 60s vehicles, and it provoked much discussion around the notion of independence. It is an African film, but is it *African*? It hardly meets the FEPACI charter's criteria of *popular* creativity, by which is meant films by and of the people and responding to their needs.

A film like Cissé's *Baara* clearly does match these criteria. It deals with a young man, newly arrived in town to find work and becoming a porter, a job which leaves him open to all kinds of abuse as he experiences various aspects of the city's social and economic structure before he becomes aware of his own position within it. Similarly, Jacques Champreux's *Bako* follows a young Malien on the trail of 'illegal' immigrant workers to France, a trail of exploitation, disappointment and sometimes death. And *Tiyabu-Biru*, directed by Moussa Yoro Bathily of Senegal, mixes fiction and documentary-style footage to show how modern life often makes traditional ritual (such as that surrounding circumcision) impossible. In their concerns, and the treatment of them, these films have meaning for most Africans, whatever their nationality. The importance of the Festival Panafricain du Cinéma is not its implied assumption of a single definable African cinema, but that its existence allows for the discussion of common issues, and the exchange of experiences, between countries as far apart—and as close—as Algeria and Senegal, Ghana and Upper Volta.

ANGELA MARTIN

Albanian Attitudes

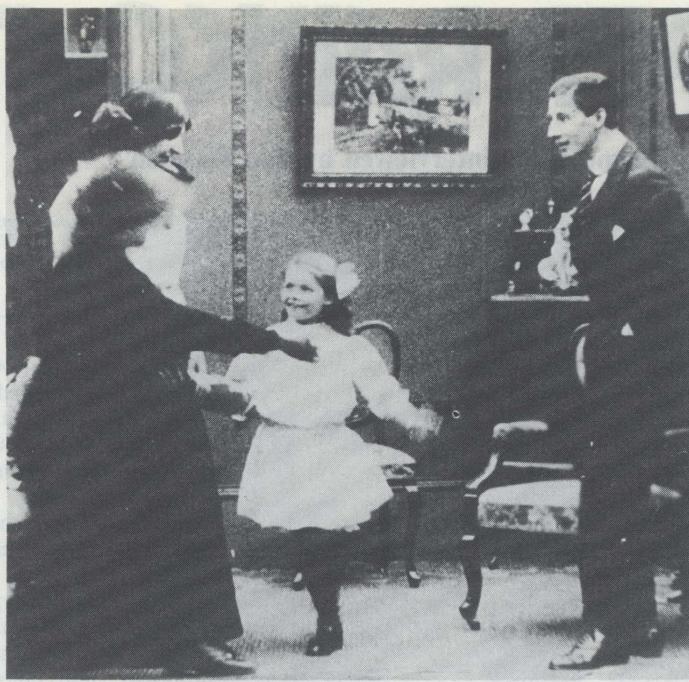
The Third Balkan Film Festival was held in Istanbul in April, and all the former Turkish colonies were invited. There were films from Bulgaria, Rumania, Greece and Yugoslavia, as well as Turkey, but it was the films from Albania which aroused my curiosity, if only because Albanian cinema has hitherto been something of an unknown quantity. The Albanians themselves wouldn't talk to me, when they realised I was American.

The first Albanian film I have ever seen was *The Poppies on the Wall*, directed by Dhimiter Anagnost. It tells the story of a boy orphans' school at the time of the Italian invasion of Albania in the 1930s,

when the children had rebelled against their fascist schoolmaster, and is made with a sense of involvement and drama, and a feeling for rhythm and camera, which astounded me. My second Albanian film, *Girls with Red Ribbons*, was not much different, except that this one was set in a girls' school and was shot in fluctuating Orwocolor. The period and the action, the conflicts and the drama were identical. Again the villains were the fascist schoolmasters, and again a secret cell of the Communist Party managed to instil the youngsters with revolutionary consciousness. It wasn't until I saw a third Albanian film, *General Gramophone*, that I began to think that apparently all Albanian films had this one topic: the bad boys were Italian fascists, and whatever the story of the film, that is the period and those are the enemies. But again there is a sensitivity for rhythm and music, photography and dramatic development, that seems to be head and shoulders above the normal 'socialist realism' films. The director is Viktor Gjika, and I asked him a few questions before the official delegation realised that they shouldn't be talking to me.

Albanian cinema, Gjika told me, didn't get off the ground until 1957, when they made their first features, after starting on the construction of studios in 1952. To date, they have made nearly 100 films, mostly in black and white, which they have little trouble obtaining and developing, and a few in colour, which they buy from East Germany and develop, after a fashion, themselves. In 1978 they began to build new studios, and now hope to increase both the quantity and quality of the films they make. And now, too, they want to export them. In a country of 2½ million inhabitants (but 450 cinemas, including mobile projection units), almost completely cut off from the civilised world by natural and political barriers, you can't begin to recoup on a regular production schedule, even if it is wholly subsidised and controlled by the state. 'It was in 1947,' Gjika said proudly, 'that Albanian was first heard on the screen. We made a lot of documentaries, May Day parades and President Hoxha visiting factories. They concerned the construction of our democracy.' The first feature films concerned 'the real life of the people, our history, mostly in the 30s and 40s and the popular movement for the anti-fascist struggle, and how our women and children collaborated with our leadership. Our films show how the Albanian labour movement reorganised our society.'

The things the Albanians try to omit from their films, a delegate said, are sentimentality, physiological and moral anomalies, pornography, sadism, psychological and Freudian dimensions, naturalism and individualism; and their films are based on the premises of socialist realism 'and on the strength from the people'. When I asked why all the films seem to have as their sole villains Italian fascists dead forty years ago, I was told they didn't make films against Italy but against the enemies of the people. I then asked if



Bamforth's 'Jessie': the sisters are reunited

they were making films in which the villains were Russians or Chinese and he said those films were now in production, but that, again, they were not anti-Soviet or anti-Chinese, but anti-revisionist. 'Albania is a small country and throughout its history has had to struggle for its identity and freedom, and this struggle, against strong outside factors, is still going on. Our films concern our past and our traditions because when a people loses its traditions it can easily be dominated by imperialists on the outside.'

This is the official rigmarole. But from the films I saw it is clear that there are at least some Albanian filmmakers, working in isolation and with only the most limited freedom, who are trying to talk a different language.

GIDEON BACHMANN

Finding His Counterpart

When I first wrote about Yorkshire's pre-World War One film industry ('The Yorkshire Pioneers': SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1976/77), the recent acquisition by the National Film Archive of the Sheffield Photo Company's *A Daring Daylight Burglary* gave me cause to believe that further works by these production companies might still be extant. The supposition proved to be justified when I examined a group of films acquired by the Archive in 1965 from Bamforth of Holmfirth.

This donation provided the Archive with its entire present stock of later Bamforth comedies, including such items as *Winky's Weekend*, *Winky's Ruse* and *The Mystic Glove*. It also contained several items by companies other than Bamforth and a number of films that, sadly, proved impossible to copy because of advanced nitrate deterioration. But the group also included two films which the Archive had not previously considered worth the expense of making viewing copies. These films, *Jessie* and *Finding His Counterpart*,

proved upon examination to be of considerable interest.

Jessie is an 1100-foot romantic drama about a young woman who is forced by poverty to allow her little sister Winnie to be adopted. Having failed to find a job, she tries to hawk toys on the street but has little success. (An intriguing shot here mixes somewhat identikit Bamforth extras with what are obviously two genuine street flower-sellers dragged into taking part.) Fainting from hunger, she is rescued by a young man who nurses her back to health. The two become engaged, and Jessie's fiancé takes her to visit his stepmother 'with whom we are going to live'. She turns out to be Winnie's adoptive parent, and the sisters are thus reunited.

The film is a rather dreary little melodrama of small intrinsic interest, but it raises some interesting historical questions in that no record exists of Bamforth having made a film with this plot, or even of this length. (None of the short comedies was much above 800 feet; the shortest of the dramatic features made when Bamforth set up the Holmfirth Producing Company was 2,000 feet long.) There is little doubt that the film was a Bamforth production: it was evidently shot in Huddersfield, bears Bamforth title-cards and uses a member of Bamforth's regular stock company in a bit part. As the legal document which Jessie signs when Winnie is adopted is dated 1913, it seems reasonable to assume that this was the production date. (The same document gives Jessie's and her eventual mother-in-law's addresses as Notting Hill and Haslemere in Surrey—an intriguing indication, unless the film is simply based on some as yet unidentified novel, that Bamforth intended to market the film on more than just a regional basis.)

This assumption raises interesting problems in that it is generally accepted that Bamforth did not restart production until 1914. One possible explanation might be that

Bamforth did restart at an earlier date, but only distributed its films locally. 1914 would then represent the date at which they began to publicise their films nationally in the trade press—by which time they had made the decision to specialise in short comedies. Alternatively, if one assumes the date on the contract to be misleading, the film may represent a first, and not very successful, attempt by Bamforth to move from short comedies into longer dramatic production, prior to the foundation of the Holmfirth Producing Company.

Finding His Counterpart, though it was eventually to prove a significant discovery, appeared inconsequential on a first viewing: some fragments of an incomplete comedy; two versions of a scene showing a suffragette meeting; some shots of a cannibal dancing round a fire. But, having logged this seemingly miscellaneous footage to determine whether enough of the supposed 'incomplete comedy' remained to be worth editing together, I realised that what the Archive had acquired was the unedited rushes of a complete Bamforth comedy.

With the Archive's permission I edited their viewing copy of this footage, to reveal a bizarre little comedy, quite different in tone from the bulk of Bamforth's output. A young man visits a phrenologist, who 'feels his bumps' and draws up a chart indicating the personality of his ideal marriage partner. Searching for this partner, the young man examines the heads of every female he comes across. When he tries this on a pair of suffragette speakers they, with admirable decisiveness, put a bomb under him. He lands on a cannibal island and is promptly popped into the cooking pot. The film ends with a gruesome close-up of the cannibal chewing the meat off a bone (a shot somewhat reminiscent of Williamson's *The Big Swallow*).

The lead role is played by Alf Foy, a prominent member of Bamforth's stock company who, though never given the billing accorded to other Bamforth stars such as 'Winky' (Reginald Switz), was on the available evidence much their most capable performer. He appears in all the extant later comedies, displaying considerable versatility of characterisation.

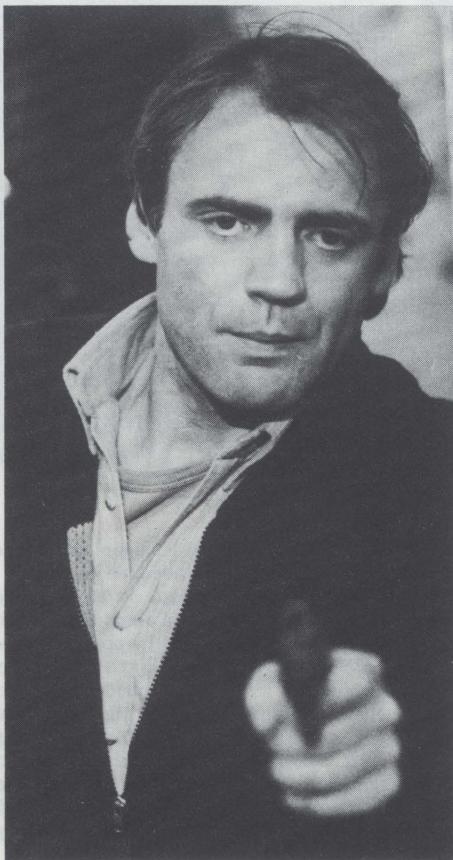
The rushes give valuable information about Bamforth's production methods. The two versions of the suffragette meeting are of particular interest, because they represent the only retake in the reel and were clearly taken on two separate occasions: the suffragettes are played by different (male) actors. This implies that Bamforth shot only one take of each scene and hired minor actors by the day. The fact that different actors were used for the retake suggests that they may have used touring artists from a local music hall. The film also provides evidence that Bamforth employed a regular props man: he is seen running on to get the cannibal's fire lit.

Having been sixty years in production, *Finding His Counterpart* received its world première at Bristol Arts Centre last February.

ALLAN T. SUTHERLAND

A PROPER RAINCOAT MAN

Bruno Ganz interviewed by Jan Dawson



Bruno Ganz in 'Black and White Like Day and Night' (left) and as Hoffmann in 'A Knife in the Head'

BRUNO GANZ: It's possible, though I'm less concerned with the general problem of the transition from literature to film than with my own transition as an actor from the theatre to the cinema. My first film, Peter Stein's *Summer Guests*, featured the entire Schaubühne company* and was taken from a play we had regularly performed together on the stage. Then Rohmer came along with the *Marquise*; and although the Kleist novella is a classical German text, it's written exactly like a film script. It doesn't explore motivations but simply describes what the characters do, how they behave. After that, I played Gregers Werle in Geissendorfer's film of *The Wild Duck*—another obsessive and another play! All this meant that it mattered less to me that Wenders' film (*The American Friend*) started from a Highsmith novel, than that it offered me for the first time a part which had absolutely nothing to do with the theatre. For me it was a kind of exam . . . a test of whether or not I could become a real movie actor. First, because Wim is a director who has no theatricality, and never will have; second, because the story wasn't a stage play; and third, because the character was a completely contemporary one—a proper raincoat man, if you know what I mean.

And Hoffmann was the first of your movie characters to start life in a film script?

That's not entirely true. I think Handke originally wrote *The Left-Handed Woman* in screenplay form. And although *Knife in the Head* was first written as a screenplay (by Peter Schneider), Hoffmann wasn't an entirely invented character: his story was partly based on the case of a man Schneider knew whose memory and speech functions were affected as a result of a car crash. Schneider visited him in hospital, and much of the film was based on his observations of him and the other patients there. I, thank God, only met him towards the end of the shooting, after he'd been released from hospital. I say 'Thank God' because he showed up with his girl friend, and I recognised in some of the problems he was having with her something I'd personally experienced.

I think that if I'd met him sooner, I would somehow have ended up putting something of this neurotic behaviour into the part. And that would have reduced it, and reduced the considerable and fantastic freedom the film held for me . . . No, this freedom didn't come from the fact that there wasn't a novel behind the script, but rather from the fact that Hoffmann was no longer an integrally functioning human being. The disturbance in his brain was a tremendous liberation for me:

of all that's angst-making about the political state of the nation. And whatever one's reservations about the film's astute mixture of mystery and politics, it's hard to have any about Ganz's extraordinary performance—a kind of Darwinism in action as it builds from the simian to the sensitive.

Although only the second Ganz role in an original screenplay (the first was in Jeanne Moreau's *Lumière*), Hoffmann—combining as he does the elements of the hunter, the hunted and the haunted—seems the very quintessence of Ganz's somewhat obsessional screen persona. With the recent British opening of Peter Handke's *Left-Handed Woman* (where he plays, as it were, the right-handed husband), and with Ganz about to become as ubiquitous on London screens as he is on those of Berlin and Munich, it seemed a timely moment to persuade the actor, impatient with journalistic clichés and, on his own admission, more inclined to observe than to analyse, to give one of his rare interviews.

Even though one wouldn't spontaneously apply the term 'literary adaptation' either to Rohmer's remarkably plastic film or to *The American Friend*, nearly all your screen parts have originated in plays or novels. Do you think the way the characters you play seem weighted down by their own pasts could derive in part from this, from the tension between the original text and a new conception of it?

Besides being the German word for 'entire', 'ganz' is also one of those adverbs which the grammarians classify as 'an intensifier'—which random fact provides a singularly apposite gloss on the career of the fiery-eyed Swiss-born actor who first riveted the attention of international audiences when he leapt over the wall in Rohmer's *Marquise von O*. Bruno Ganz, who, at 38, has been making films for not quite four years, appeared in no less than three of them at this year's Berlin Film Festival: as Jonathan Harker in Herzog's *Nosferatu*; as the chess prodigy whose obsession lands him in an asylum in Wolfgang Petersen's *Black and White Like Day and Night*; and in Reinhard Hauff's newest film, *A Knife in the Head*, whose central figure, Hoffmann (Ganz), has captured the national imagination, as well as a substantial percentage of its box-office receipts.

Rendered amnesiac by a nervous policeman's bullet, Hoffmann is compelled to build again from zero an adult's knowledge of language and gesture, and also to conduct into his past a doubly perilous investigation, from which he needs to discover whether he is, as the police maintain, a dangerous terrorist, or, as his friends would have it, a mild-mannered scientist. In common with only a few other screen characters (most of them, like Franz and Katharina Blum, from the same production stable), Hoffmann has been popularly adopted in Germany as something between a symbol and a symptom

* From 1970–75, Ganz was an actor with the resident company at the 'Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer', Berlin.

that he needed to relearn how to match words to the things they represent was a liberation . . . from thoughts and imagination. I prepared for the part by spending two weeks observing eighteen patients in a Munich hospital who had all suffered cerebral apoplexy in motorbike crashes. I thought that I shouldn't invent anything, that I should simply observe how these people move, what goes on in their speech lessons, how they talk to one another, what the atmospheric colour is.

As well as Hoffmann's evolution from animal to restored human being, I saw your performance as the metamorphosis of Bruno Ganz into Gérard Depardieu, who makes a brief intrusion into *The Left-Handed Woman*, and with whom you were to appear in Benoît Jacquot's aborted film about the Algerian war. Are you conscious of an increasingly strong affinity in your acting styles?

Depardieu belongs to that breed of film actors to whom I somehow feel very close. I admire him very much. Of course, because of the situation of film in France, he's obliged to play in all kinds of films that . . . I wouldn't like to be in. And I'm a little afraid he may wear himself out in the process. He and De Niro, for example, touch me very profoundly as a spectator. I feel them to be incredibly close to me, without being able to say why.

As a screen actor, do you generally work the way you did on the Hoffmann character—from observation rather than identification?

I don't seem usually to get involved in long discussions about motivation, or to work with directors who do. Certainly, on *The American Friend*, Wim and I never talked much about, for instance, what Jonathan is thinking the first time he kills a man. But generally I do have a tendency to seek the correspondence between the part I'm playing and some biographical experience of my own. With Handke, that was never possible. Peter insisted right from the start that he wanted no psychology, no individual quirks. Each character in the film had to be complete at all times, had to have all possibilities available, even if the audience would only see certain of these: each one had to be a universe, so rich as to be total.

And he wanted no realism, because he said he couldn't stand it in the cinema when someone goes to produce a banknote and one sees all those inevitable bits of paper in his wallet, or all those characters busy smoking cigarettes—he was determined to avoid all that in his own film. He made it seem so convincing. But on the other hand, when I appeared in Peter's play (*Die Unvernünftigen sterben aus*), I'd had six weeks to prepare the part; and I think I would have liked as much time for *Left-Handed Woman*. Because the texts are so poetic and, for me at least, complicated to say. Once I hear Peter speaking one of his own sentences, it becomes transparently easy; but on *Left-Handed Woman* I don't think I was prepared enough, even though Peter himself was always willing to change things on the basis of suggestions or circumstances . . . For instance, in the scene where the father arrives, there was a long speech for him to make, and Minetti, the actor, said he couldn't learn that much by heart overnight; so then Peter said, let's suppose it's something the father has written on the train, and when he arrives, he can

simply read the written page on the station.

But to get back to your question, about whether I'm more a behaviourist or a psychological actor. When I first read a part, there's a kind of emotional reaction inside me . . . mostly, it's a kind of affinity, a stirring of something that I've never expressed or have only recognised in the course of reading the part. So it begins from my own feelings, but then I think I try gradually to draw these out, to try to find a surface and a form for them, and I don't think there's ever time enough for that with a normal shooting schedule. I think I'm not so much afraid of giving an unfeeling performance, constructed from the outside, as of having my feelings getting stuck inside me and never reaching the surface.

So, how easy was it for you to avoid psychologising the Handke role?

That was different, in that the part was written for me. Once, when I visited Peter in Paris, he told me he'd like to write something where he had a real person in mind before he started to write, because he had never done that before. And he asked if he could use me. I said 'of course'; and in fact the only character in *Left-Handed Woman* to have a name is the husband, Bruno. The others are simply the Wife, the Father, the Child, the Actor, etc. . . . but he's Bruno. I don't think it's so evident on the screen, but when you read the screenplay it's really striking.

Later Peter explained that although he'd started from things in me that he had remembered or found interesting, his Bruno had rapidly moved away from me and become one of his characters. I suspect I told myself that, because he's still basically Bruno, I didn't need to worry too much about what kind of character he is, about his psychology. But, looking back, I should have done more preparatory work on the part.

For me, two small things disturbed the otherwise hermetic perfection of Handke's film: one was Depardieu's lightning guest appearance as an itinerant hippie . . .

It was a kind of homage, he's a close friend of Peter's . . .

. . . and the other was the Ozu poster on the kitchen wall, which seemed to belong to the film's director rather than to its heroine.

That was a homage too. Handke never talked to us directly about Ozu's influence, but he did show one of the films—I think it was *Tokyo Story*—and said very clearly that he would like us to have images of that type, with the camera wherever possible at that sort of height. He didn't mean systematically, or that the European characters all had to sit on the floor.

The poster was on the wall, and prominent, but even that is sort of accidental, because the house in the film is the house Handke lives in, in Clamont. And except for three pictures, by painters who are friends of his, it's furnished exactly as it was by the mathematics professor who rented it to him when he went to North Africa.

As a foreigner who admires the film enormously, I've been astounded by the hostile reception it has had in Germany from both the film press and the young left in general. A vicious reaction, and one directed, it would seem, as much against Handke personally as against the film.

The entire discussion about political-aesthetic questions that got going in the student era, and which motivated even a great many poets to concern themselves with helping the working masses, created a climate which was unbelievably difficult for serious writers. Handke was essentially the first person here to take a stand against it at the height of the student era, and he has come in for a lot of mud-slinging ever since, being attacked as living in an ivory tower and trying to obstruct the 'new sensibility'. Peter's firm stand has made him a target for the entire left—in so far as they concern themselves at all with aesthetic problems or with art in general.

I'm not offering any profound observations; I've simply noticed that whatever understanding there was for the problems of art, etc., was totally wrecked after 1968. Within six months, what was conservative or reactionary or fascist or progressive had been prescribed right down to the smallest detail. Anyone who didn't conform to this approved scheme had had it. And things have scarcely improved since. It has evolved into an absolute system of censorship, but it has also become a form of self-censorship. Nothing more can be produced unless it's by people who resist it hand and foot and elbow. There are a few of them, thank heaven, Herzog and Wenders, for example, who won't let themselves be nailed down like that; if they ever did, they might as well pack it all in.

When we were shooting *The Left-Handed Woman*, I actually thought the film might contribute something to those all too predictable discussions about women's liberation, and to the dogmatic views on how it should be accomplished. I thought it might broaden people's ideas and cause them to rethink what it means to abandon the idea of the couple, even if it's just to move into a group. . . . The film is really a plea for living alone, and the whole inner experience the woman goes through is never presented as any kind of promise of paradise, quite the reverse, it's shown as an incredible strain on her, but one can also see the points at which it is actually a liberation, and one can see that exchanging the couple for the group is no simple equation.

But instead of reacting as I had imagined, people have seized on certain 'non-realistic' words in the dialogue, like the word 'illumination' with which the woman explains her decision to separate, and they've used these words to dismiss the film as a mere fairytale. They've also implied that Peter is disqualified from knowing what he's talking about, because he's a man. Whereas, in fact, he knows everything about it, because for several years now he has been living alone with a child—"alone with a child"—that means, of course, that there's another human being in the house, but it also means being alone.

I think perhaps it's wrong to try to 'explain' the film's images, just because people haven't had the patience simply to observe them. They're so concrete, one can only reduce them by description. The film isn't an act of meditation, there's no guru behind it, it's of an incredible simplicity, almost like the sentences of Flaubert which the heroine is translating. The images have a calm and plasticity and an exactness and perfect proportions. The film is beautiful . . . nothing more.

BILLY WILDER'S



Detweiler (William Holden) outside the barbed wire of the Villa Calypso

'And the candle by which she had been reading the book filled with trouble and deceit, sorrow and evil, flared up with a brighter light, illuminating for her everything that before had been enshrouded in darkness, flickered, grew dim and went out forever.'—Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

'I've never tried to repeat a success of mine. But sequels are very fashionable today. The picture I'm preparing now, *Fedora*, well, I was seriously thinking, to make it sound more fashionable, of calling it *Fedora II*.'—Billy Wilder

Adrian Turner
and Neil Sinyard

It is night time at a deserted railway station. A whistle shatters the silence and a locomotive billowing a great geyser of white steam comes around a curve. The black-cloaked figure of a woman appears before us like an apparition, her taut white face emerging out of that linear background giving the shot a momentary, startling reminiscence of Edvard Munch's painting 'Geschrei—The Scream'. She walks purposefully towards the advancing train and as we hear a shout off-screen—'Fedora!'—she launches herself into its path, her figure caught for a ghostly instant in the glare of the lights before vanishing beneath the wheels. The Expressionist lighting, the enormous steam engine and the theatrically cloaked woman all evoke the atmosphere of the 30s; one expects to hear the word 'Cut!' and the request to do it once more please. But the event we have just witnessed is apparently real, the year is 1977, and an old movie star is involved.

'*Fedora* is dead,' announces the brittle-blonde hostess of an American news show from a gaudy studio. 'The legendary movie star was killed last night in a suburb of Paris when she either jumped or fell under a train.' The programme continues with a tribute, reminding viewers of the star's performances as Emma Bovary and Lola Montès, her retirement and her comeback in the 60s (appropriately, in a film about resurrection entitled 'The Miracle of Santa Cristi') when she amazed everyone by her youthful beauty, and concludes with coverage of *Fedora*'s lying in state in her Paris mansion. Amongst the thousands of mourners who slowly circle

the open casket is Barry Detweiler (William Holden), an independent film producer, who now takes up the story.

Perched on a balcony above the grief-stricken fans is gathered *Fedora*'s small group of intimates: the heavily veiled and disabled Countess Sobryanski (Hildegard Knef), the Count (Hans Jaray), the star's former dresser Miss Balfour (Frances Sternhagen) and Dr. Vando (Jose Ferrer), a world famous cosmetic surgeon responsible for *Fedora*'s everlasting beauty. They gaze down on the scene as if they were already dead, frozen like waxworks, waiting for *Fedora* to join them. And adding a faintly incongruous note to the

FEDORA

proceedings, a palm court orchestra serenades the mourners from another balcony with selected mood music—Grieg's 'Last Spring', Sibelius' 'Valse Triste'. The sense of gloom is relieved by an abundance of floral tributes. Detweiler observes all this with noticeable disdain, disparaging the reporters with their flashbulbs and those 'goddam TV cameras', and then begins to tell us the story of the death of the 69-year-old star, played here by Marthe Keller, who lies serenely in the coffin, wearing a pair of silken white gloves and looking not a day over forty.

This is the seductive opening of *Fedora*, in which Billy Wilder immediately establishes a connection with *Sunset Boulevard*, made almost thirty years earlier. When, at the beginning of the earlier film, Joe Gillis (William Holden) asks us if we would like to know the facts, he says we have 'come to the

right place'. Holden is to be our guide through death once more, allowing us the privilege of being able to eavesdrop on the lives and deaths of the rich and famous before the gossip columnists get their hands on the story. Once again Holden plays a man out of luck and on the make, pushing a screenplay with which he hopes to lure *Fedora* out of retirement a third time. The screenplay is a remake of *Anna Karenina*, but *Fedora* only gets to play the final scene. Like Norma Desmond, who defies reason and truth by claiming the identity of Salome, *Fedora* ends her life as Tolstoy's tragic heroine, playing the scene to an empty house. When *Fedora* throws herself under the train, Wilder chooses to freeze the frame momentarily, as if in horror. This deliberately self-conscious effect is unusual for Wilder but a device which beautifully aligns style and theme. For the whole film, like *Sunset Boulevard*, contrasts

the unsuccessful endeavour of two ageing egocentrics to make time stand still with the ability of Hollywood and film (by technical means like freeze-frames, by the preservation of performance) to make time do exactly that.

One of the most powerful elements in *Sunset Boulevard* was its chillingly accurate prophecy of the Hollywood to come, contained in the presentation of Joe Gillis—'the cheap new thing'—and the secondary characters whose pursuit of the dollar is paramount. Thirty years later, *Fedora* is a lament for the Hollywood of today. Everyone in the film is old or, we ultimately discover, behaves much older than his or her years, and represents certain values now disdained. It is the film of an ageing Crowned Head, to borrow the title of Thomas Tryon's book which contains the original story of *Fedora*, who refuses to abdicate even if it means working in exile. It is the work of a director at

Fedora on the terrace of the villa



the height of his powers but whose creativity is being frustrated by a radically altered industry and the demands of a new audience.

In 1950, when he made *Sunset Boulevard*, Wilder's position was one of power and success and he could view the dilemma of the unsuccessful screenwriter with compassion but also with a certain detachment. In the late 70s, Wilder's position is much closer to that of his hero, Detweiler, a proximity which he seems to make no attempt to disguise. When Detweiler finally gets to renew his acquaintance with Fedora he tries desperately to persuade her to appear in *Anna Karenina* since he can then finance the picture with tax-shelter money. *Fedora*, which is officially registered as a West German-French co-production, was financed in an identical fashion since no American studio was interested in it. Not only does 'Detweiler' as a name seem an elaborate re-arrangement of Wilder's own (and he does correct someone who calls him 'Getwyler')—it would not do to be confused with William Wyler); William Holden even looks like Wilder at some stages and is given to wearing glasses and a very Wilderian straw hat.

The identification between Detweiler and Wilder is not complete, of course. One cannot imagine Wilder seriously proposing a remake of *Anna Karenina* under the title 'The Snows of Yesteryear', as Detweiler is doing. However sad and movingly desperate, Detweiler's complaint about the modern Hollywood—'The kids with beards have taken over, with their zoom lenses and hand-held cameras'—is surely intended to be seen as ultimately excessive and self-pitying. (Wilder might be drawn towards some aspects of the sentiment, but he has also been generous in his praise of directors like Coppola and Scorsese, both bearded and known to employ the zoom and hand-held camera.) Above all, Detweiler did not make his film; Wilder has. Towards the end, having heard the full story, Detweiler says to Fedora: 'This would have made a better picture than the script I gave you.' 'Yes,' she replies, 'but who would you get to play it?' Wilder, not Detweiler, has got the people to play it and has made the script; and the result is magnificent.

Nevertheless, there is sufficient kinship between Wilder and Detweiler to explain why *Fedora* seems closer in spirit to the melancholy of *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* than to the Gothic extravagance of *Sunset Boulevard*. At the time of *Sunset Boulevard* Wilder was full of confidence and could be baroque and outrageous: his audacious picture of Hollywood is felt from a position of security within it. *Fedora* is more troubled and possibly even richer because of that, the vision of a man who knows the system inside out but who, like Detweiler, has been increasingly placed in the situation of the outsider looking in. Thus, the tone of the film is extraordinarily ambivalent, constantly pulling between nostalgia and bitterness, between sombreness and romance.

What is remarkable is that this ambivalence is thematically of the utmost relevance and importance. Just as we can hardly think of the Wilder and Holden of *Fedora* without the ghosts of the Wilder and Holden of *Sunset Boulevard* in the background, we can similarly reflect that the whole film is about ghosts, mirror images and doubles—about the pull

between truth and illusion, youth and age; between Detweiler as he was and Detweiler as he is; and, in particular, between Fedora I and Fedora II, and how one becomes the mirror image of the other. Even the structure has the same pattern, being in two distinct sections, the first dealing with Detweiler's strenuous attempts to meet Fedora and his subsequent concern for her safety; the second presenting the same story from a different perspective and resolving and rationalising all the ambiguities raised in the first. In the first part, Detweiler resembles a character in a mystery thriller, pitched headlong into a dark labyrinth. In the second part, as *Fedora*—literally and metaphorically—reveals a side to the mystery he has not seen, he is changed from participant to audience, from subject to object. Like Keyes in *Double Indemnity*, Sir Wilfrid Robarts in *Witness for the Prosecution* and Holmes in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, Detweiler is another Wilder investigator who misinterprets the evidence before him.

Occupying nearly two-thirds of the film, Detweiler's narration is not only concerned with his attempt to interest Fedora in returning to the screen. It also relates his mounting suspicion that she is being kept prisoner in the Villa Calypso,* the house on a small island off Corfu where she lives with the sinister Countess, Miss Balfour and Dr. Vando. The tone of the first part of Detweiler's narration has closely resembled *Avanti!* as the American checks into a seaside hotel whose owner (Mario Adorf) is a less refined but no less capable version of the earlier film's Carlucci, with a string of relatives or connections to help Detweiler go where he wishes. But unlike Wendell Armbruster in *Avanti!*, who assimilates a sun-drenched Ischia and European values, Detweiler is to experience violent storms and tragedy—not regeneration (which Fedora is striving for) but disillusionment.

His first glimpse of the villa's occupants is through binoculars and from behind the villa's barred wire and 'Keep Out' signs. Worth noticing here is the care with which Wilder undercuts Detweiler's certainty by interposing barriers between him and the things he sees. By occasionally shooting through a long lens in wet and misty weather, Wilder gives a shimmering insubstantial quality to the image which eliminates all sense of surrounding landscape and, as an extension of this, all sense of freedom: the effect is to alert us to the limitations placed on the hero's visual perception whilst he is becoming steadily convinced of Fedora's entrapment.

His first meeting with Fedora at a souvenir shop does nothing to allay his suspicions, since she seems in a trance-like state, borrows money from him, and is clearly frightened at being discovered by Miss Balfour and the chauffeur. Summoned to the villa after he has made enquiries by phone and letter, he is told by the Countess that a comeback for Fedora is impossible since her health is failing, only

* In Tryon's original story the villa, situated on Crete, is not given a name. Wilder's choice of 'Calypso' reflects the enormous pains he takes in elaborating his principal themes. According to Greek mythology, Calypso (meaning To Hide) ruled the small island of Ogygia in the Ionian Sea where Corfu is situated. When the exhausted Odysseus drifts ashore the beautiful water nymph Calypso takes care of him for seven years. 'If you stay with me,' she says, 'you shall enjoy immortality and ageless youth.'

for Fedora to appear on the staircase and express excitement at the project, an enthusiasm quickly stifled by her being dragged back to her room. In a later scene in his hotel room, when Fedora unexpectedly turns up to ask Detweiler to sell some of her fan mail, they are interrupted by the arrival of Dr. Vando and the chauffeur, and he watches helplessly as they bundle Fedora off, strait-jacketed, in a Rolls-Royce. His search of the deserted villa next day reveals clues that seem incongruous and baroque—exercise books with 'I am Fedora' written all over them; a drawer full of white gloves (a startling detail which recalls Max von Mayerling's white gloves as he plays Bach on the wheezing organ in *Sunset Boulevard*).

Discovered in his snoops by the chauffeur and knocked unconscious, Detweiler awakens a week later in his hotel room and is shown a newspaper report of Fedora's death. His entire investigation, which began as an innocent—if desperate—business trip, has ended in violence and tragedy. His conclusion is that Fedora was being held captive by an invalid and eccentric Countess, a dedicated spinster and a sinister quack, and has been killed by them.

In the middle of this flashback, Detweiler sits down to write a personal letter to Fedora, recalling how they first met in 1947, and we move into a further recollection of the past. Wilder begins the sequence by cutting from a shot of the ageing Detweiler writing his letter to a tracking shot behind Fedora as she walks past the studio technicians, has her robe removed by Miss Balfour, and descends gracefully into an ornamental pool. It is a shot which, like Norma Desmond's visit to deMille's set in *Sunset Boulevard*, takes us from the business realities of making motion pictures to a complete illusion in a single camera movement. As she lies naked in the pool, Detweiler, at that time an assistant director nicknamed 'Dutch', is assigned the task of covering her nipples with water lilies. He stares down and yawns before the goddess beneath him and slaps down the leaves to appease the Legion of Decency. Considerably piqued at his casual attitude to her body, Fedora has summoned 'Dutch' to her dressing-room and they get into a conversation about his life style. 'What, may I ask, is a cheeseburger?' she enquires, an eloquent way of indicating her isolation and her imperious way of asking for a date. 'Dutch' obliges: they have a one-night affair on a beach in his battered second-hand Ford (contrasting with Fedora's vintage Rolls, just as Joe Gillis' car has contrasted with Norma's Isotta Fraschini).

Ostensibly, this flashback-within-a-flashback might seem rather abrupt and contrived, but the brief affair between Detweiler and Fedora is to have poignant overtones later. The evocation of the innocent vulgarity of Hollywood in the past is highly relevant to Detweiler's present desperation; and the connection in the flashback between flowers and artifice is a beautifully planted clue to the truth behind Fedora's lying in state. Almost subconsciously, Detweiler has uncovered a significant link between the film set of 1947 and the elaborate performance taking place now over Fedora's body in her Paris mansion, but the meaning of the evidence before his eyes eludes him.

All this passes through Detweiler's mind as he looks down on Fedora in her open casket. There are two points to be made immediately about this narration. The first, as we have indicated, is that this interpretation of events is to be revealed as wholly inadequate; every scene with Fedora and the Countess is to take on a different meaning when we learn how thoroughly he has been misled. The second is the film's strategy in having the narration take place alongside Fedora's open coffin. The film never leaves the chamber in which Fedora lies in state: all the flashbacks begin and end here.*

The film is saturated with the imagery of death and, indeed, the whole structure takes on the form of an inquest. The lavish lying in state is a sort of masque to conceal and diminish the ravages of death. Even Fedora's face, crushed by the train, has been repaired for the occasion, an action which recalls Dr. Vando's experiments and the magic performed by Hollywood make-up men. There is a phrase in Webster's great Jacobean tragedy *The White Devil* which could be said to summarise this aspect of *Fedora*: 'a dead man's skull beneath the roots of flowers.' Like Webster's play, *Fedora* has this strange confluence of beauty and decay, the sense of luxuriance and glamour concealing something that is evil and horrible. The impression of terrifying truths lying under the surface of things pervades the film's imagery: Fedora's dark glasses and white gloves; the Countess' veil; Fedora's terrified eyes, alone visible under the bandages when Dr. Vando's treatment seems to have gone wrong and he is cutting through the cloth to inspect the extent of the damage; even a minor detail like the chauffeur's friendly smile before he cracks Detweiler's skull hard enough to leave him concussed for a week.

Sumptuous photography intensifies the contrast between surface beauty and underlying horror. Indeed, the film's most stunning single shot, that of a carriage and two horses, festooned with flowers like the coffin and neatly wrapped in cellophane to protect the horses from the rain, is a visual joke which nevertheless, in its echo of Fedora's insulation from the outside world, strikes at the core of the film's meaning. This motif (the worm under the rose) could even be taken as a statement on the star system itself: what Detweiler characterises as 'sugar and spice and, underneath that, cement and stainless steel.'

* Many of Wilder's films border on the macabre, and coffins and cemeteries are used extensively: the very title of *Five Graves to Cairo*; Keyes' claim in *Double Indemnity* that 'straight down the line' leads to the cemetery; the monkey's burial in *Sunset Boulevard*; the cave as metaphorical coffin in *Ace in the Hole*; the coffin leaking booze and the funeral parlour/speakeasy in *Some Like It Hot*. It should also be noted that Wilder's recent films—*The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, *Avanti!*, *The Front Page*—are to a significant degree based on situations concerned with death and burial. There are the coffins in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* intended for the midgets, Emile Valladon and the canaries; the entire plot of *Avanti!* is concerned with Armbruster's efforts to procure one zinc-lined coffin, then another; *The Front Page* takes place during the preparations for an execution and obliges the condemned man to spend much of the film incarcerated in a roll-top desk, another of Wilder's surrogate coffins from which there is little or no chance of escape. *Fedora* is another story of confinement; and, as in so many Wilder films, the coffin does not contain what people think it contains.



Ghosts of 'Sunset Boulevard': Detweiler meets Fedora (Marthe Keller) at a souvenir shop

Connected with the imagery of death is, inevitably, the theme of time, to which attention is drawn through the film's extraordinarily intricate structure. 'You can't cheat nature without paying the price,' Dr. Vando has said at one stage, subtly alluding to his own experiments which, we will discover, have gone grotesquely wrong. But it is another way of saying that you cannot cheat time. The inexorability of time, the characters' entrapment within it and yet their attempts to transcend it, are a constant preoccupation of the film. Its actual running time of 112 minutes corresponds almost exactly to the time scheme of the main action, when Detweiler approaches the open coffin at about noon and when he leaves just before two; the rest is memory, reverie and explanation. The impression is of an attempt almost to halt time, to live in a world of memory, all the more ironic since all this takes place alongside Fedora's dead body: not only a potent reminder of mortality itself but of a character who has refused to submit to the demands of time and contrived her own death.

The flashback structure defines people who want to turn back the clock, who are reluctant to relinquish their grip on old glories, whose answer to the frighteningly inevitable fact of ageing is to try to defy time itself: Fedora's submission to Dr. Vando's gruesome experiments, the tragic effects of which generate the whole plot. Even the impression of time standing still as they talk around Fedora's coffin is an illusion since, in a brilliant stroke at the very end of the film, Wilder reveals that Detweiler's presence at the lying in state is *itself* a flashback, time having moved on a further six weeks. In other words, the film's 'present tense' is actually the past.

But the flashback structure—and, in particular, the use of multiple narrators—also brings to the forefront another major theme in the film: the relativity of truth. We have been alerted to this in the first meeting between Detweiler and Dr. Vando when they talk at the hotel bar, Detweiler quizzing the Doctor about his legendary yet lurid repu-

tation. 'How much of it is true?' he asks. 'All of it. None of it,' replies the Doctor. 'It depends on who you ask.' It is an early clue that Detweiler's narration might not be as reliable as he thinks. Now, by the coffin, he puts his suspicions before the Countess—that she and the others were keeping Fedora prisoner and are largely responsible for her death. Initially to silence him (but, in retrospect, for much more profound reasons), the Countess, later supported by the others, begins to tell Detweiler the truth. From this point we move into one of the most exquisitely sustained passages in modern cinema, in effect an ending that lasts over half an hour, a tightly organised series of sequences whose quickening tempo give exactly the sense of a situation accelerating to an unforeseen point of climax, and an ending whose explanations change the meaning of every scene that has gone before.

'Never mind the face,' says the Countess to Detweiler, 'look at the hands.' The white gloves, which for so long have concealed Fedora's real age, are removed, but the hands are quite without wrinkles. From behind the heavy veil, the Countess reveals her own terrible disfigurement. Detweiler is looking at the face of the real Fedora, now played by Hildegard Knef. (We suddenly realise that had not registered before in the discreet subtlety of Wilder's *mise en scène*: we have until now been shown only one side of the Countess' face.) The body in the casket is that of her daughter, Antonia, the illegitimate child of Fedora and Count Sobryanski. 'You're Fedora?' asks Detweiler, amazed, to which the Countess replies with scrupulous accuracy, 'I was Fedora.' The destruction of her face was the moment when her hold on the identity of Fedora vanished.

By choosing to reveal the 'twist' in the story at this juncture, Wilder makes his final radical departure from Tryon's original, which keeps its readers in suspense until much nearer the end. The film's 'sudden revelation', coming after 70 minutes, has attracted some criticism. Reviewing *Fedora* briefly from the 1978 Cannes Festival for SIGHT AND SOUND, Richard Roud, who found

it a 'big disappointment', thought that the 'twist' 'comes far too late in the film to do any good. Hitchcock was right: it is much better to let your audience in on the secret early in the game, so that they can enjoy the contrast between what they know and what one or more of the characters don't. Here we learn the secret at the same time as William Holden, and although we may salute the screenwriter's (*sic*) ingenuity, it is very difficult at that stage to make the necessary readjustment in our view of the main characters. Of course, there are many funny moments...'

Roud's reference to Hitchcock to illustrate Wilder's structural miscalculation could hardly be more injudicious. If there is a precedent for *Fedora* it is to be found pre-eminently in Hitchcock's masterpiece, *Vertigo*, which also has the boldness to give away its ending two-thirds of the way through so that one can experience the last part of the film with the full weight and new understanding of what has gone before. Much criticised at the time, Hitchcock's decision, as is now widely agreed, was the right one: the effect is to intensify the film's depth and power, and we would argue that Wilder's tactic has the same effect in *Fedora*. Indeed, the two films have much in common: an investigator pursuing a figure who is actually a 'double' of the person he thinks she is, and being present at her 'death' which is not really her death; and in both, a profound exploration of the worlds of illusion and death and disintegrating personality.

Another weakness of Roud's position stems from that common failing of critics (cf. Pauline Kael on *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*) who approach Wilder with certain misguided expectations and then attack the director for not conforming to them. 'Of course' there are many funny moments, but *Fedora* will be a disappointment for anyone approaching it in the expectation of a cynical comedy. Clearly Wilder is striving for something more than dark humour, and the film's unconventional structure is indicative of his entire strategy. The fact that we only discover the deception at the same time as Detweiler is precisely the point. *Fedora* is concerned with gleaning truth from fiction (the themes of *Sunset Boulevard*, *Witness for the Prosecution* and *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*). Like Detweiler and, later in the film, like Henry Fonda and Michael York, we are lulled into misconceptions, a technique which draws attention to *Fedora* as structure, as illusion, as a system of fallible visual signs.

Indeed, Detweiler does recognise the artificiality of the 'lying in state', comparing it to 'some goddam première' and asking the Countess rudely, 'How many shows a day are you planning to have?' But the deeper meaning of this performance escapes him. Wilder tricks us, and his hero, into taking things literally at face value. When the usher refers to the lying in state as a performance, he is not only describing *Fedora*'s last role, but is invoking the theatricality of Wilder's *mise en scène*. The elegant tracking shots around the coffin seem self-consciously 'cinematic'; the high-angle shots of the fans filing in emphasise the setting as a film set; the wide-angle shots which reveal the TV camera equipment force an association between a representation of reality and a movie in progress, referring directly to the flashback to the Hollywood studio.



The Countess (Hildegard Knef) and Dr. Vando (Jose Ferrer) watch the Oscar presentation from an upstairs window

One further point should be made about the film's unconventional form. Normally, Wilder favours a triangular structure, with the central figure wavering between the two other sides of the triangle who symbolise the corrupt and innocent sides of his personality. But this kind of sexual tension is completely absent from *Fedora*. One never feels that Detweiler hopes to resume his one-night stand after a break of thirty years; and Antonia's love for Michael York seems as much a reflection of her despair and isolation as a genuine romantic feeling towards him. Unusually for Wilder, the film is completely dominated by women; the men—the Count, Dr. Vando, Detweiler himself—are passive figures whose lives ebb and flow according to the whims of *Fedora* and Antonia.

The relationship between *Fedora* and Antonia is one of the most moving aspects of the film. Ironically, Dr. Vando's disastrous operation on *Fedora*, resulting in disfigurement and a stroke which has confined her to a wheelchair, has had one beneficial effect: it has brought mother and daughter much closer together. The situation is dramatically changed when a letter informs *Fedora* that she has been cited for an honorary Academy Award. She is obviously reluctant to admit the President of the Academy, Henry Fonda, to the villa to make the presentation; but suddenly struck by the likeness of her daughter to *Fedora*'s former self, she has an idea. What if Antonia should impersonate her and accept the Oscar on her behalf?

The scene of the presentation ceremony—just Fonda, a photographer, and Antonia as *Fedora* on the terrace with the sea in the background—is visually stunning. Gerry Fisher's glowing photography is at its most atmospheric here; it is striking how Wilder finds a visual beauty in Europe that is entirely absent from his films set in America. Also, its poignant effect arises from the thematic precision of the scene's conception. Henry Fonda as

himself contrasting with Marthe Keller's playing of Antonia, who is herself playing *Fedora*, is at the heart of the film's intricate pattern of illusion and reality, role-playing and deception. The scene is observed discreetly from an upstairs window by the Countess—the real *Fedora*—with Dr. Vando behind her. Yet Wilder's visual arrangement has also an acute undertone of sadness. Far from being detached from the scene, the Countess, alias *Fedora*, should be down there receiving her Oscar, but she is not. The man behind her, Dr. Vando—who has been behind her in various ways through her career—is a discreet reminder of the reason for her inability to accept this ultimate accolade: it is his ruinous surgery that has consigned her to the role of spectator.

Watching Antonia collect the Oscar, *Fedora* says to Dr. Vando, 'For thirty-five years I had a speech ready. Now she gets to make it.' For all her gratitude and love for Antonia, she cannot conceal her pain and envy. It is surely this which explains her decision to tell Detweiler the truth, rather than any fear she might have of his going to the police with his suspicions. It is not fear that prompts her; it is, characteristically, vanity. She wants part of the glory, the recognition. She wants him to see that this homage to the figure in the coffin is not for Antonia but for *her*. It is perhaps her only victory over time: she can be present at her own funeral to reap her laurels in person.

The photographs of the Oscar presentation have been published the world over; the temptation to continue the deception proves irresistible. What follows is a film-watching sequence and a montage of Antonia's grueling cosmetic sessions to prepare her for the screen as *Fedora*, which cannot help but recall the similar sequences of *Sunset Boulevard*. When Norma Desmond screens her old movies, she believes that the

Hollywood she knew in the 20s still awaits her outside the walls of her mansion and that the much younger version of herself on the screen is still herself: the screen is a mirror, casting back flattering, misleading images. In contrast, Antonia watches *Fedora*'s old movies to catch her mother's mannerisms and gestures. *Fedora*'s mirror is, in fact, not the screen but her daughter. She does not have to watch her films to see herself as she was; she can see it in Antonia's face. The sixty-three mirrors have been removed from the villa because, as she says, Antonia 'had become my mirror'. But as with *Sunset Boulevard* the whole thing is to end up in madness and death, the role of *Fedora* finally enfolding Antonia and destroying her own identity.

For all the difference of presentation and detail, the two film-watching scenes have similar implications: the dangers of illusion invading reality, of the public life invading the private life and forcing, as in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* as well, a duality in the individual which cannot be reconciled. *Fedora* might not be as mad as Norma Desmond but she shares something of her grandeur and obsessions; like Norma, she is possessed by the public image of herself and attempts to defy nature in order to preserve it. The tragedy is that she brings down both herself and her daughter in her consuming egomania.

When Detweiler starts to attack *Fedora* for having exploited her daughter in this way, *Fedora* stops him: 'What would you give to be reborn... To have a second chance?' It is a particularly pointed question to put to him. What is his project of *Anna Karenina*, or 'The Snows of Yesteryear', but a remake and a chance to make a comeback; and is not *Fedora* the person he needs to make it work? Is his desire to use *Fedora* very different from her use of her daughter? The underlying question is perhaps even more personal and severe: what has happened to the Detweiler she knew to age and embitter him so prematurely ('What would you give to be reborn...')?

At first it has been a kind of game, a masquerade. It is the moment when Antonia, disguised as *Fedora*, falls in love with Michael York during a film they are making together, 'The Last Waltz', that the full implications of the deception become clear. She cannot reveal herself as Antonia without betraying her mother; and yet her mother is the Countess. Miss Balfour, who is as fanatical in her devotion to her mistress as the redoubtable Mrs. Danvers in *Rebecca*, puts the dilemma succinctly. The masquerade must continue 'until *Fedora* dies. And you are *Fedora*'. There is no Antonia any more. Her youth has been taken away; also her identity and freedom. Even her kiss with Michael York is in the presence of a camera and microphone, against a painted studio backdrop of the Schönbrunn Palace at Vienna, which exactly conveys the illusory relationship and the definition and entrapment of her personal life within her screen identity.

In desperation, she attempts suicide: she has also begun seeking solace in drugs, which has accounted for her distracted behaviour in Detweiler's presence and her requests for money. 'I hate this face!' she cries. She scrawls 'Antonia' on the hospital window; the exercise books proclaim 'I am *Fedora*'. When Dr. Vando has burst in on them in

Detweiler's hotel room he has said to her: 'You must not forget who you are. You are... *Fedora*'. She straightens, intimidated, and is led out. At the time, Dr. Vando's words seem a rebuke to a great star who has a reputation to protect. In the context of the deception, they are an instruction to Antonia to continue with the role. But from Antonia's own point of view, the line is a statement of doom, implying exactly the opposite of what is ostensibly said. For her, it can only mean that she *must* forget who she is; she is Antonia.

Antonia is one of Wilder's most tragic heroines and her death makes a discussion of suicide in Wilder's work inevitable. In 1969, Wilder was dismissive about the suggestion that suicides are recurrent events in his films: 'Two suicides in forty years of film-making, I don't detect any trend there,' he said to the interviewers of *Cinema* who had mentioned *Sabrina* (*Sabrina Fair*) and Fran Kubelik (*The Apartment*). But there are several more instances of attempted suicide in Wilder's work, not to mention numerous reported suicides in his films. Characters such as Don Birman in *The Lost Weekend*, Norma Desmond, Sabrina, Fran Kubelik and Bud Baxter in *The Apartment* and Molly Malloy in *The Front Page* all attempt or consider taking their own lives. Wilder's attitude, however sympathetically he might view the character, seems to be that the suicide attempt itself is the result of either lack of will, romantic indulgence or moral cowardice: it is a dramatic device for taking a character's self-contempt and humiliation to its most precarious point so that the reassertion of identity will be all the more intense, involving and affirmative.

Antonia, however, has no identity to reassert. Hers is the only successful suicide bid, an attempt moreover that the film seems resignedly to understand and not condemn. Whereas the other characters have not reached the end of the line, still having the potential for life and love within them, Antonia has failed to exist as a person, and the only way out is to kill both herself and her *doppelgänger*. By throwing herself under the train, she can destroy her face. Ironically, the face can be reconstructed. Equally ironically, the people around the body, while exchanging recriminations about the poor girl's fate, can be seen as each in a different way her killers—*Fedora* for initiating the deception; the Count for not stopping it; Dr. Vando for wrecking *Fedora*'s face in the first place; Miss Balfour for forcing Antonia to confront the hopelessness of her situation; even Detweiler, whose damaging investigations have pushed the situation to its tragic conclusion.

The palm court orchestra begins to tune up as the real *Fedora* concludes her tale. The mansion is opened for business once more and *Fedora* and her entourage resume their positions on the balcony. The orchestra strikes up, with instructions from *Fedora* to play some Chopin and Ravel instead of the Sibelius, which is a bit 'tacky'. The guards replace their white gauntlets, the usher looks severe, Antonia's make-up is checked and the crowds come in to pay their last respects to an adorable fake. Among the mourners this time is Michael York, who places a single rose in the casket. Detweiler finally goes to the visitor's book, turns to a brand new page,

and poignantly signs himself 'Dutch'. As he walks from the mansion he tells us that *Fedora* died on Corfu a few weeks later, rating a few short obituaries. *Fedora* I and *Fedora* II have run their course.

Detweiler has asked *Fedora*: why this lavish lying in state, the flowers, the music? *Fedora* explains: 'Endings are very important. That's what people remember. The final exit. The last close-up.' It is a beautiful statement, conjuring up a host of memories: Wilder's own much-criticised endings; the ending of *Sunset Boulevard*, with Norma asking for her close-up; the remarkable ending of this film, all half an hour of it.

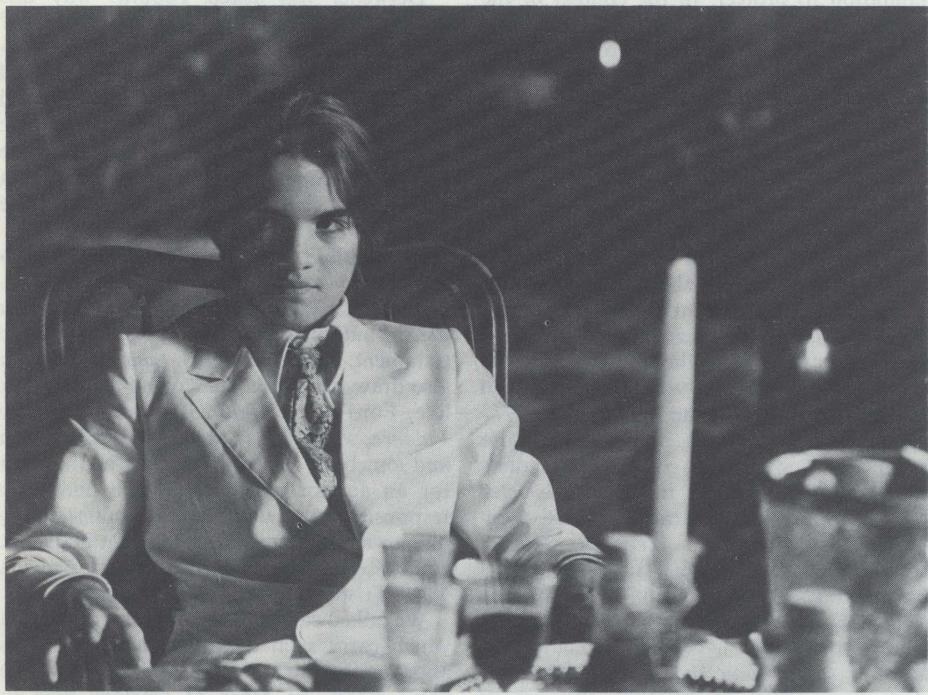
Above all, it is a statement which seems to relate *Fedora* to the whole of Wilder's work. For whether it be his last film or not, *Fedora* has the authority and the feeling of an artistic testament. Like Chaplin's *Limelight*, which also draws on the maker's own biography, or like Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, which is also about legend and truth and somebody claiming the charismatic credit for an act for which he is only indirectly responsible, the work seems unmistakably like an artist's farewell to his own audience. *Fedora* seems like Wilder's own *Last Waltz*, a *Valse Triste* that is in no way 'tacky'.

We talked earlier of the dualities in the film which carry such thematic resonance. It is appropriate now to talk of the duality of the film's effect, its sense of tensions held in exquisite balance, which so enriches its impact. On the one hand, *Fedora* is a mesmerising narrative and superb entertainment in its own right without need of any reference to itself. On the other, it is Wilder's intensely personal synthesis of the preoccupations of a lifetime: film-making, Hollywood, Europe, masquerades and grand deceptions, stars, regeneration, charisma, reality and illusion, truth and legend. In one sense it has a very personal ache, which Detweiler expresses when his project has been rejected: 'As Sam Goldwyn said, in life you have to take the bitter with the sour.' But it also has an irony and wit that puncture self-pity and self-indulgence and morose bitterness. When Detweiler signs himself 'Dutch' at the end, he has regained an identity he thought forever lost, identified himself with the Hollywood of the past, and transcended his own bitterness in his sympathy for another's tragedy.

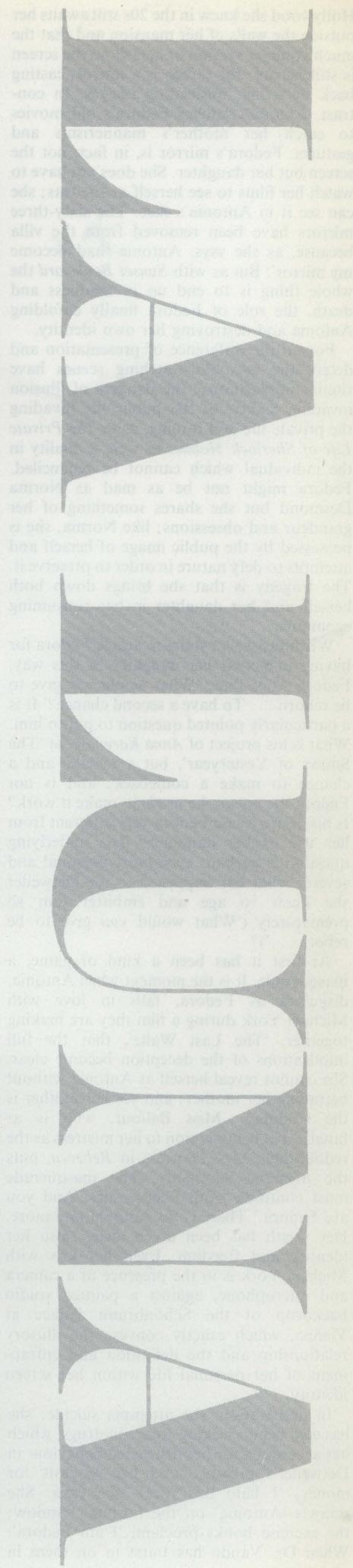
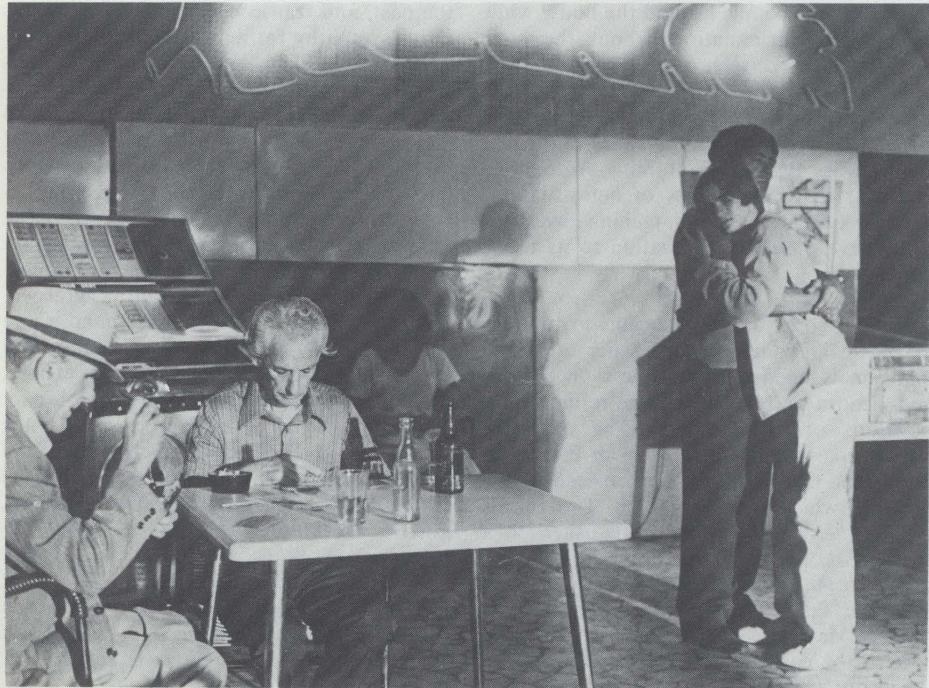
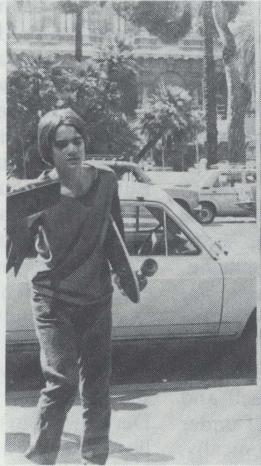
Fedora could be seen as one of Wilder's blackest films, charting the complete destruction of a human being through the selfish delusions of others. But it is equally true that no film of Wilder's is more visually entrancing nor more moving, its relationships—between mother and daughter, even between Detweiler and *Fedora*—having a poignant sense of potentiality and waste, of opportunities for contact momentarily grasped, then tragically lost. On the one hand, there is harsh reality and human corruption and egomania. On the other, there is artifice, legend, art, which can always triumph over mere mortality. The show goes on, for the screen can conquer age, even conquer life. If this is Wilder's final statement, he could scarcely have signed off with more elegance, grace and beauty.

Adrian Turner and Neil Sinyard's book on Billy Wilder, from which this is an extract, will be published later in the year by B.C.W. Publishing.

BERTOLUCCI'S



Bernardo Bertolucci's 'La Luna' will be seen in the autumn, and at the moment no one is giving away anything about the content, other than that Jill Clayburgh (opposite page) plays an American-born opera star living in Rome. Mathew Barry (above; right with Babetta Campeti; below with Franco Citti) plays her son; the cameraman is Enrico Storaro. The plot is reported to be 'surprising and extraordinary'.





Although the name of Věra Chytilová appears occasionally in articles on feminist cinema or as a footnote to examinations of Jacques Rivette, the majority of her films remain unavailable to both critics and audiences. When that situation changes, she will be seen (alongside Resnais, Godard and Rivette) as one of the radically innovative film-makers of the 1960s. The controversy in Czechoslovakia surrounding the release of her relatively harmless *The Apple Game* (1976) is symptomatic of the ways in which her films have been consistently interpreted as a threat to the precepts of Socialist Realism.

Chytilová's debut came early in the complex series of developments that gave rise to the Czechoslovak 'New Wave'. The origins of the 'Wave' are varied but can certainly be traced back to the impact of Krushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956. The initial response to de-Stalinisation in Czechoslovakia was small. This was not surprising given the extent of the early 50s purge, itself necessitated by the potential threat of a strong democratic socialist tradition. However, there were important signs of change in the cinema, and during 1957–58 several films came under fire for their critical attitude towards society or for 'formalism'. As part of a campaign against 'remnants of bourgeois thought', a conference was held at Banská Bystrica which led to the banning of five films and the reorganisation of the Barrandov studios. While the struggle against the schematic Socialist Realist formulas of the early 50s is, to some extent, of only academic interest, one

development was of more lasting importance: a rebirth of Czech lyricism. Three films placed an emphasis on visual form which revived qualities characteristic of the 30s: Vojtěch Jasny's *Desire* (1958), František Vláčil's *The White Dove* (1960) and Stefan Uher's *Sunshine in a Net* (1962). The contributions of the cinematographers Jaroslav Kučera (*Desire*) and Jan Čurík (*The White Dove*) were of central importance. This revived emphasis on the image influenced a number of the 'New Wave' films; and it was not surprising, given Chytilová's formal interests, that both Čurík and Kučera were to work with her on features.

Věra Chytilová had originally studied philosophy and architecture, moving into films after varied experience as a draughts-woman, photographic retoucher and model. She worked as a script girl and, despite the studio's refusal to recommend her, gained a place at FAMU (the Prague Film School) where

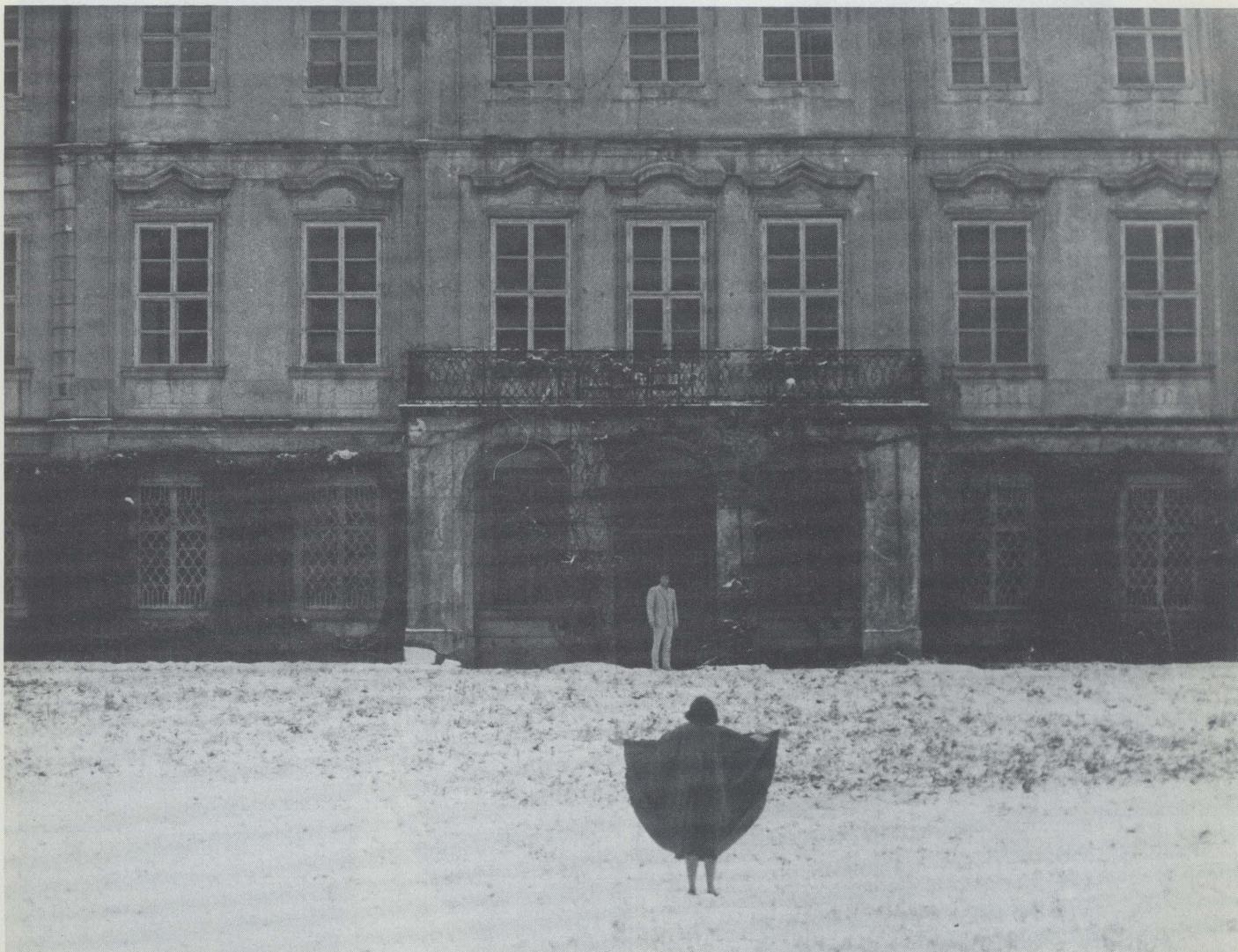
Peter Hames

THE RETURN OF

she studied direction under Otakar Vávra. In an arrangement similar to that adopted for Milos Forman's *Competition* (1963), her graduation film *Ceiling* (1961) and a second short, *A Bagful of Fleas* (1962), were released together as *There's a Bagful of Fleas at the Ceiling* (1962). The film's release coincided with *Sunshine in a Net*, often regarded as the beginning of the 'New Wave', and preceded the debuts of Forman, Jireš, Schorm, Němec and the other leading Czech directors of the 60s.

Like Forman and others, Chytilová was strongly influenced by the fashion for *cinéma*-

'The Fruit of Paradise'



VERA CHYTILOVA

vérité, and although *A Bagful of Fleas* was a 'staged' film it used non-actors and improvisation to give the effect of authenticity. It focused on a situation similar to that of Forman's *A Blonde in Love* (1965)—the cotton mills of Nachod, where the young women outnumbered the eligible men by five to one. The heroine is severely criticised by the works committee after missing work to be with her boy friend. Unflattering portraits of the factory officials led to the film's release being held up and official complaints.

It is, however, the earlier graduation film *Ceiling* that points to the innovative character of Chytilová's later work. Its subject was conceived within the prevailing constraints of Socialist Realism. In the original script, a former medical student becomes a fashion model and acquires an affluent lover. Disgusted by her experiences, she finally boards a train where she meets some simple country people, an encounter which brings her back to her medical studies. As Josef Skvorecký pointed out in *All the Bright Young Men and Women*, this exemplified the then fashionable 'return to the people for cathartic purposes'.

As completed, the film is more subtle although maintaining elements of its original moralising intent. Chytilová did not forget her original script, her own experience as a model, or her plans to provide a critical examination of the fashion world. The boredom and amorality of the model's life is repeatedly stressed and seen from a feminist viewpoint. Early in the film, she is shown posing for fashion photographs in, successively, an imaginary tennis match, a scene staged in front of an Air India airliner, and another with an automatic dredger. The sessions are linked in a stylised and elliptical manner as the backs of two male heads move from one episode to the next as if watching play in the non-existent tennis match. The fact that these images of women are created by men is emphasised. A male narrator observes, 'He photographed me only once—thank heavens.' Even the model's subjective thoughts are spoken by a man.

Later scenes reinforce this totally negative view as they show the ritual application of make-up and the routine of acting as a living dummy for the dressmaker. Although much of this material is shot *cinéma-vérité* style, snippets of conversation overheard from fellow models are highly selective. They are shown as entirely preoccupied with boy friends, sexual liaisons, foreign clothes and cars. Marta's awareness of this superficiality

is pointed up by an unexpected encounter with former student friends, re-establishing links with an 'innocent' past. In contrast to this conventional working out of the film's story is its conclusion, an abstract sequence recalling Jeanne Moreau's walk in *La Notte* and the end of *L'Eclisse*. It consists of a montage of distinct images which together make up a poetic statement, losing narrative content at an early stage.

It is this sequence that calls into question the obvious social criticism Chytilová has been making. At one level there are typical images of night (a couple, a man in a car who tries to pick Marta up, a cat). On another, there is a critique of consumerism, of which Marta is a part. While dummies in a shop window, lampshades and a neon sign in the form of a rocket are typical aspects of her society, they are also presented as something strange and alien. Abstract images in which Marta becomes part of the composition—ceiling, trees or stone—suggest nothing beyond their formal properties unless it is the existence of man as an object among objects.

In fact, it is precisely a sense of alienation that the film conveys, not merely from work in a male-dominated industry but from society as a whole. Despite a 'formal' rebirth (Marta walks through trees towards the horizon), the overall mood is not negated. At the end, Marta meets her peasant family and shares their home-made bread. The film then ends with an inconsequential dialogue exchange—'It's raining.' 'Yes, forever raining'—and a concluding image of rain on the window and the sound of the train moving over the tracks.

While Chytilová finds that *Ceiling* no longer accords with her view of the world, her formal interests undercut the obvious elements of moralising propaganda. The extensive use of recorded music, the formal editing of *cinéma-vérité* material and an interest in non-naturalistic relations between sound and image all point towards the kind of aesthetic complexity developed in *Daisies* (1966). Even in her first film, the varying levels of presentation encouraged the spectator to become actively involved in the creation of meaning.

Although there had been significant breaks with formal and thematic orthodoxy since the late 50s, the 'New Wave' proper is usually dated from 1963. It was this year that saw the feature debut of a generation of film school graduates that included Forman (*Peter and Pavla*), Jireš (*The Cry*) and Chytilová

(*Something Different*). All three films are concerned with contemporary themes presented in a critical and non-glamorised way: Peter, the hero of Forman's film, is a young misfit encountering the realities of his first job, while Jireš' Slavek is a television repair man and one of Chytilová's heroines is an 'ordinary' housewife. At the same time, all three mark a formal break with tradition, ranging from the casual and improvisatory work of Forman to the complex montage/flashback techniques of Jireš and the more radical approach of Chytilová.

Something Different developed logically from the documentary impulse of *A Bagful of Fleas* and the feminist aspects of *Ceiling*. It tells the parallel stories of two women, one being the world champion gymnast, Eva Bosáková, and the other a housewife. Broadly speaking, the story of Eva is shot as 'documentary' while that of Věra, the housewife, is constructed as conventional fiction. Chytilová examines the sacrifices imposed on the would-be gold medallist, the rigidity of her training programme and the narrowness of her existence. Věra escapes from her domestic routine through fetishistic consumption and a casual love affair. Although the logic of the film points to the inadequacies of both life styles, each woman undergoing a crisis that makes her aware of the limitations within which she lives, Chytilová avoids any pat conclusion. As with *Ceiling*, the film is inconclusive and both women finally 'choose' the role in life that they had found inadequate. Chytilová called the film 'a drama of the eternal struggle for immortality amidst the finality of human powers.' The words are grandiose but the statement does indicate that she was aiming for something more than the conventional Women's Lib message to which it is often reduced.

The main formal device is one of simple alternation, each scene with Eva being followed by one with Věra. While there is no narrative link between the 'factual' and 'fictional' elements, there is a comparative and structural one. The main point of the juxtaposition is to provoke thought but it is also used for purely formal ends. There is, for instance, no need for the brief cuts to Eva during Věra's love affair. The shots of Eva are included for the sake of poetics, the rapidity of the cutting creating a heady feeling of excitement appropriate to Věra's situation.

The conception of parallel stories had, of course, been employed before in Agnès Varda's *La Pointe Courte* (1955), though to different effect. Chytilová now regards her approach as correct but the execution as clumsy. For Jacques Rivette, however, it is a film that becomes progressively '...more mysterious and questioning' (*Cahiers du Cinéma*, February 1968). The constant juxtaposition of 'documentary' and 'fictional' reality allows no unthinking adjustment to either. Just as *Ceiling* had exposed the mechanics of the fashion photograph, so Chytilová here exposes the creation of the successful gymnast image. The one link between the two worlds of the film is Eva's appearance on Věra's television screen. Later on, in a head-on interview with Eva, we are made conscious of the tape-recorder and the camera, the means of creating her public image. When it becomes clear that something has gone wrong, that she cannot continue as

required and give advice to the young on how to become an honoured artist, the recorder is switched off. She reveals that she has been searching for 'something different'.

While *Something Different* remains a key work in the development of women's cinema, it is, like *Ceiling*, an aesthetic experiment. Towards the end of the film, Eva's success in the world championships provides a climax and an excellent opportunity for formal poetics. (In true *cinéma-vérité* fashion, her success or failure was a genuinely unknown factor in the development of the film.) It is presented with all the glory of a triumphant occasion. The sequence begins with close-ups of cameras and the sound of applause, a reminder of the media and of public display. At first, the images are indistinct and the cameras are only gradually brought into focus. The sound of clapping could equally well be that of a flock of birds. As she was to do in *Daisies*, Chytilová combines both distanciation and aesthetic appeal.

The exercises themselves are constructed from a combination of the competition and flashbacks to Eva's training programme. The highly formal overhead shot is taken from the training programme, but the whole is cut together so effectively that detection is almost impossible. There is one extraordinary section in which Eva's hand appears top right and her foot bottom right of the wide screen composition. The camera moves along the bar from the left and appears to be directly responsible for nudging her into a leftwards cartwheel. This is followed by a flash pan to the photographers, two frozen swan dives (one past, one present) seen from the side, and a repeat of the same action seen in movement from the front.

The year of *Something Different* was marked by important events in Czech cultural life. January 1963 saw a symposium of contemporary prose at which attacks were launched on both the use of political jargon and the restrictions of Socialist Realism. The novelist Milan Kundera complained of the isolation of Czech literature from the outside world. In May, the conference that finally led to the rehabilitation of Kafka was held at Liblice. The publication of Karel Kosík's philosophical work *Dialectics of the Concrete* (1963) also provided the first Marxist attempt to give an account of 'bureaucratic centralism' in Eastern Europe. The theatrical productions of 1964-65 included Ionesco, Beckett, Dürrenmatt and Albee, while the visual arts were already drawing from strong native traditions based in Surrealism and Constructivism.

Thus the mid-60s saw a more direct attempt to criticise the excesses of the bureaucratic state, together with a return to international traditions in the arts. Films such as Juráček's *Josef Kilián* and Němcov's *Diamonds of the Night* and *The Party and the Guests* showed a strong Kafkaesque influence, while the work of Forman and Schorm dealt more directly with the compromises and crises of everyday life. This 'experimental' and 'philosophical' mood was clearly more favourable to the avant-garde direction taken by Chytilová's next two films, *Daisies* and *The Fruit of Paradise* (1969).

Despite the radical nature of Chytilová's work and her concern to tell the 'truth' at all costs, there was little preparation for the originality and aesthetic complexity of

Daisies. The film records a succession of scenes or 'happenings' that are linked primarily to the subject of food. Two 17-year-old girls, played respectively by a salesgirl and a student, decide that the world is meaningless. As a result, they play a game of 'it matters—it doesn't matter' ('Vadi?' 'Ne vadi'). The game, according to Chytilová, '... if played systematically and for prestige, may lead to death.'

The girls live in a vacuum, without past or future, and their cheating and amorality lead to the apparent destruction of themselves and everything about them. Throughout the film, the urge to consume is constantly linked with its obverse of destruction. The climax is reached when they sample, eat and destroy a huge banquet, trampling on the food in their stiletto heels and swinging from the chandelier. The girls' attitudes are linked to the world of political destruction, the falling of the chandelier to a nuclear explosion. The film ends with a dedication to all those who become embittered at the sight of a smashed up salad—alone!

Chytilová argued that the social criticism would have a greater effect if the comic side of the 'happenings' was accentuated. The intention, she said, was to 'divert the spectator's attention from the psychology of the characters', to 'restrict his feeling of involvement and lead him to an understanding of the underlying idea or philosophy. From a certain point of view, our film is a philosophical documentary in the form of a farce.' While *Daisies* is full of references lost to a non-Czech audience, there is every reason to share Skvorecký's doubt that the meaning of the film can be restricted to a parable on the destructive force of nihilism and aimless provocation. Again, the moralistic idea from which it develops is only the starting point for a highly allusive and diverse superstructure.

Much more so than *Something Different*, to which cinematographer Jan Čurík made a major contribution, *Daisies* resulted from the interplay of several talents, notably Ester Krumbachová, who collaborated on script and design, and Jaroslav Kučera, now Chytilová's husband. Chytilová said in a 1968 interview with Jacques Rivette and Michel Delahaye that '... we decided to let ourselves be bound by nothing. Absolutely nothing. We would free ourselves of all the implications of the story and keep only the dialogues, very precise and very evocative, which would remain absolutely fixed. These dialogues assured us of a base, they guaranteed that we would not abandon the meaning of the film, they were in a sense the guardians of that meaning.' But Kučera, speaking in another interview of his use of colour, has pointed out that things do not always turn out as expected. He had intended to use colour as a means of disparagement, not to create aesthetic or beautiful effects. In fact, the results were not in line with what the filmmakers had foreseen.

The basic device of the film, two heroines (one blonde and one brunette), has obvious precedents. One is the Brecht/Weill *Seven Deadly Sins*, which exposed the hypocrisies of a materialist society through two girls, Anna I and Anna II, who may be sisters or aspects of the same personality. 1965 had also seen the release of Louis Malle's *Viva Maria!*, in which a theatrical double act (Bardot and Moreau) fomented South American revol-

ution and invented the striptease. Chytilová's own words suggest a definite Brechtian influence while the Malle duo may have inspired the names, Marie I and Marie II. If Malle is an influence, however, *Daisies* is nearer to the anarcho-surrealism of his *Zazie dans le Métro*.

The film falls into five major sections, the first of which serves as a prologue. All of them are preceded by short scenes showing the girls at a swimming pool. There are major scenes set in their apartment, and the central three sections also involve permutations on the locations of public lavatory, restaurant and railway station. Sequences outside this repetitive structure, but framed by it, show them variously in a garden (paradise), a cabaret (self display), in the country (the search for meaning), and generating the final orgy that leads to punishment and rehabilitation. Chytilová has not merely destroyed narrative but replaced it with a 'musical' or 'poetic' format.

While *Daisies* opens with a degree of coherence—images of war and explosions, the two girls' decision to be spoiled, falling from a garden (paradise) into reality—the rest of the film presents major problems for any kind of analysis. The constant fragmentation and alternation of 'scenes' together with the intricacy of Kučera's visual 'effects' make it extremely difficult to write about. Frequently, a frame by frame analysis is required to determine precisely what is being projected on to the screen. Despite his comments on the unexpected results produced by his use of colour, Kučera has also spoken of his desire to create 'subjective' images (i.e. images which are not primarily of something but which generate a meaning of their own).

The apartment scenes are crucial to the film, since it is here that the girls reflect on their successes, failures and future 'games'. They are all filmed in colour, the formal variations on a theme in each case producing a self-contained unit in which decor and music are structured into the requirements of the happening. The focal points of the five scenes may be summarised as boredom, death, consumption, meaning and destruction. An example of the technique can be taken from the scene concerned with 'collection' (of boy-friends). The room is decorated with a typographic collage of names and the 'action' accompanied by a kind of concerto for typewriter.

The three major set pieces that take place outside the film's repetitive structure are the cabaret, the scenes in the country and the final orgy. In the first and last of these, the film-makers take the opportunity for a mischievous identification with their two heroines.

In the first, the two Maries enter a box at a fashionable night spot. The sequence alternates between them and the official cabaret act, which is a Charleston danced to a wordless jazz number by Eva Pilarová, Czechoslovakia's leading pop singer. Whereas this performance is condemned to heavy sepia, that of the rival show—the two Maries—has all the advantages of Kučera's colour experimentation. The box in which they are sitting is plush red and resembles the stage of a Punch and Judy show. Rhythmically, bottles and glasses appear on the table before them (they've brought their

own beer). As they get drunk, their drinks overflow with iridescent bubbles and an arm waving a straw becomes an elongated waving after-shadow. As Marie I goes boss-eyed in red, the screen changes colour to yellow and then green in accord with her eye movements. Marie II blows prismatic bubbles to crowd applause. The applause turns to whistling as the signalling of the waiters becomes more frantic and the two girls are ejected. Apart from being a teenage disruption of establishment pleasures, the sequence almost certainly has a private and subversive meaning. It probably refers to the attempts by Novotny's cultural department to discredit pop singers. The least of the accusations was that a leading jazz singer had fallen into a nightclub audience while drunk. This is precisely what the two Maries do to the accompaniment of scat singing.

The final orgy has links with Buñuel's *Viridiana* in its attack on the established order, on opulence and decorous behaviour. The girls open a door into a vast chamber laid out for a luxurious banquet. Symphonic music links it to the tastes of establishment culture but the use of Wagner ('Götterdämmerung') is also prophetic. Their mindless destruction stems from a desire to sample all the food and moves from sticking their fingers into everything in sight to dancing on the food in a cross between a fashion show and a striptease. Throughout, their activities are accompanied by an assortment of martial themes, including the Austrian national anthem. They conclude by swinging on the chandelier (a convention for 'Hollywood' decadence), but this is at the same time presented as a trapeze act and accompanied by a drum roll. The sound of breaking glass overlaps with that of them hitting water. Like witches, they receive a ritual ducking on the end of oars.

The banquet is literally the smashed up salad to which Chytilová refers in her postscript. The fact that the film was on target was soon demonstrated when a deputy of the National Assembly complained about the wastage of food at a time of agricultural difficulty and called for measures to be taken against it. The girls in fact undergo rehabilitation and try to put everything to rights. Significantly, it is only after the final dialogue exchange ('Is it a game?'—'No.'—'We are really truthfully happy.'—'But it doesn't matter') that the falling chandelier merges with an atomic explosion. Conformity based on apathy is ultimately more destructive than any of their stupid excesses. It is such apathy that permits the wars of the twentieth century. It is the conclusion of a moralist.

Chytilová has made her points about the film being a philosophical documentary, about diverting the spectator from involvement, destroying psychology and accentuating humour. There is no question that all this is done. Narrative is rejected in favour of a constant rhythmic fragmentation in which the girls' comments on what they will do next are half-addressed to the audience. At no time is there any attempt to create a realist illusion. In parenthesis, it is worth noting the extent to which the film was influenced by experiment in the visual arts. Krumbachová's background was that of the art school and her ideas for sets and costumes show a strong awareness of contemporary developments. Chytilová had herself revealed similar interests in her contribution to *Pearls of the Deep*

(1965)—the sequence in which she follows the process of print-making. The emphasis on collage/montage recalls the work of Medek and there are superficial links with the 'poème-objets' of Kolař. The influence of 'happenings' is clearly apparent even if the final effect is subject to rigorous control at the editing stage.

It is clear that Chytilová, Krumbachová and Kučera did not know precisely what would emerge from their collective work. It is quite likely that the film was never intended to be as subversive as it proved. After all, Forman had already depicted with sympathy the problems of apathetic and 'non-positive' youth. At a time when overt social criticism had already emerged in various films, there was nothing in *Daisies* that broke significant new ground. What was new was its aesthetic form, and that was not appreciated by those in authority.

In view of the film's ambiguities, it is not surprising that Chytilová's own attitude towards it should appear inconsistent. For instance, she claims that if the meaning is sometimes 'invisible' and certain scenes are not understood, this reflects badly on the film. On the other hand, she demands freedom for herself as creator and for the audience as spectators, intending that the interplay between the two should be active. The spectator must be constantly on the alert, the rapidity of the film and its disjunctions constantly threatening or 'reversing' his first interpretations. The point of the film is to

make a single interpretation impossible, to force a conclusion that what has been seen constitutes only part of 'the truth'. The film is a provocation in the context of conventional audience expectations, and it usually has precisely that effect both in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere.

Chytilová has always been attracted by new methods and themes, attempting to make a fresh start with each of her films. With *The Fruit of Paradise* she remained true to her views and produced a film to which it is even more difficult to ascribe any one meaning or group of meanings. It is much influenced by the Commedia dell'Arte, both in the stylised presentation of its characters and the scope allowed for improvisation. Chytilová deliberately selected members of a provincial theatre company to play the leading roles.

The theme story, never her prime concern, is rendered with all the ambiguity that might be expected. The film opens with a stylised introduction that symbolises the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. Eva (Eve) is married to Josef (Adam) and they are shown early in the film under a tree, from which an apple falls. Living in the garden is Robert (the devil/the serpent), who is waiting to tempt them. It turns out that Robert is a murderer who has killed six women. He pursues Eva, his intended victim, but the story has an unusual twist—it is she who kills him. That is the original story conceived by Krumbachová but, as with *Daisies*, it serves only as a springboard for what follows. Unlike the earlier film, *The Fruit of Paradise* does not

'Daisies': the two Maries in the restaurant





'The Fruit of Paradise': 'Everything is nothing but a dream'

have the same passionate attack and finds its justification in a search for formal and visual beauty—much of it arising from a process of improvisation.

Unlike the rest of the film, the prologue is highly structured and could almost be detached as a separate entity. During the credits, which consist of paintings of trees and fruit, the soundtrack assembles a number of sounds in a 'musique concrète' manner, including bells and the unearthly cry of the peacock. The naked bodies of Adam and Eve are presented in slow motion to the accompaniment of choral music. They become a screen for microscopic close-ups of leaves, the human flesh covered by the veins and textures of plants. It is all extraordinarily beautiful and shows Adam and Eve as literally part of a natural paradise broken only by the words of the serpent (they may pick apples from the forbidden tree), the demand for truth (a choral chant) and the hardness of rock (a visual and aural punctuation).

The film defies realistic interpretation and, to some extent, interpretation of any kind. In the spirit of Chytilová's 'active interaction', however, the attempt is worthwhile. While the setting is deliberately unclear, the characters appear to be staying at a country hotel in a lakeside spa where people come to enjoy the mud cure. This provides a rational explanation for the couple who are naked but buried to their shoulders in mud, and for various scenes related to a house, restaurant and picnic on a beach. Robert, we are told, is a bachelor who always spends his holidays there. The film is based on a series of encounters between Eva and Robert; and although she may be his intended victim, it is her infatuation with him that predominates. Eva is fascinated by the secrets she may discover in his red/brown attaché case (a kind of Pandora's box). In the final scene between them, they strike highly stylised poses by the lake. It is Robert's function to kill her, despite the fact that they are in love and that she was the first to come to him voluntarily. His final words are 'Everything is nothing but a dream. You are a lie.' A shot rings out and he falls dead at her feet. Eva is wearing his overcoat

and finds the gun in her pocket, the contradictions providing an illustration of his comment. In the film's final section, she calls out to her husband, 'Don't try to find out the truth, I no longer wish to know.'

The film's verbal message clearly lies in Josef's comment that he does not understand anything, Robert's view that everything is a dream and Eva's wish to give up the search for truth. To search for truth, whether or not personified in a romantic ideal (i.e. Robert) is to court death. It is, of course, a fulfilment of the biblical prophecy and a comment on the nature of the film but, in view of Chytilová's earlier insistence on 'truth', it could also be interpreted as a personal testament.

Much more than *Daisies*, *The Fruit of Paradise* requires the audience to construct its own meaning, its own comprehension of 'truth'. To seek a fully coherent explanation of the relations between Eva, Robert and Josef is to pursue an endless and doomed enterprise. But it is surely no accident that Robert is dressed in red, the colour of passion, and Josef in grey, the colour of routine. Robert is both an eligible means of escape, the devil, and a murderer—a fatal combination for those tempted beyond the set conventions of the ideal state (whether this belongs to God or Socialism). Josef represents safety, hypocrisy and compromise, and it is to him that Eva returns.

The film is experimental in that it explores unconventional and 'impossible' associations, and Chytilová's strength lies in the confidence with which she approaches such impossibilities. Even more than *Daisies*, it is a film in which the visual qualities dominate, the most original aspect of this being Kučera's feeling for texture within the pictorial composition. There are two purely 'aesthetic' scenes where the characters become points of colour in an abstract composition. The first is when the group of guests is playing with an orange balloon on the lake shore. The carefully selected colour points become blurred in a visual effect that recalls the paintings of Seurat. Later, after Robert's 'murder', there is an extraordinarily beautiful sequence as Eva's red-clad figure runs through the green fields. The image is rhythmically blurred,

jerking, seen sideways up, but is at the same time fluid and graceful. Presumably 'justified' by the attempt to convey her anguish, it is simply a sequence of remarkable beauty.

There is no parallel with the fragmented montage of *Daisies*. The only overt use of montage is to intercut close-ups of animals' heads at strategic points in the action. These are mostly linked to the appearance of Robert—in the first instance as a cock, in the last as an eagle and an alligator. Two scenes derive from the editing techniques of *Daisies* in their use of eliminated frame methods. These elements of the film spring primarily from the inspiration of Kučera and Chytilová, but interact with the decor, costumes and food which are a clear continuation of her *Daisies* collaboration with Krumbachová. In her deliberate play with narrative and improvisation, however, *The Fruit of Paradise* is the film which brings Chytilová closest to the work of Jacques Rivette.

This was the last film on which the team of Chytilová, Krumbachová and Kučera was able to work together. In 1969 Krumbachová directed *The Murder of Mr. Devil*, a film which has been little seen but which is again centred on food and has been described by Freddy Buache (*Positif*, November 1970) as a penetrating analysis of the possessive relationship of a bourgeois couple. Since then, she appears to have returned to her former role as a designer. Kučera has worked regularly, but rarely with his previous freedom. The exception was his work on Juraj Herz's *Morgiana* (1972), a fantastic tale in which the action is sometimes seen through the eyes of a cat, sometimes under the effects of hallucination.

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had no immediate effect on the film industry and 1969 saw the fulfilment of production decisions made the previous year. 'Karel Pryl' argued in *SIGHT AND SOUND* (Summer 1971) that the films provided a kind of final testament and surpassed the earlier achievements of the 'Wave'. Many of the films were banned on completion, however, and when in 1969 the head of the Barrandov studios was arrested and the five autonomous production groups closed down, Chytilová was just one of the lengthening list of directors unable to make films. Of the 60s directors, Forman, Passer and later Němcová chose exile, and in the early 70s only Kachyna, Jireš and Herz from among those associated with the 'Wave' continued to make films. In 1976, however, new films from Vláčil, Menzel, Dušan Hanák and Chytilová did something to restore the international reputation of Czech films.

It is clear that the 'New Wave' is regarded as an unfortunate aberration, a period of self-indulgence at odds with the reinstated adherence to Socialist Realism. This is quite independent of what may or may not have been the political attitudes of film-makers to the reforms of the late 60s. Chytilová herself was never officially blacklisted—her sin was to break with illusionism and make 'incomprehensible' films. During the early 70s she worked on several projects, notably a screenplay on the life of the nineteenth century novelist Božena Němcová, which was recommended for production in 1972. It was apparently rejected on the grounds that it 'might destroy the viewers' illusions about Božena Němcová.' *The Apple Game* was

passed for production in 1974, though a complicated set of intrigues prevented it from being made until 1976.

During 1970–76, Chytilová was unable to work and prevented from travelling abroad to the various festivals of Women's Film to which she was invited. In 1975 she wrote an open letter to President Husák detailing the difficulties she had experienced, which had culminated in an attempt to terminate her contract. She was accused of having adopted an elitist stance, of making uncommitted and pessimistic films that were experimental by nature, overvalued by the critics and appreciated primarily in the West. She managed to refute most of these charges and laid her problems quite firmly on the doorstep of male chauvinism within the industry. The apparently favourable response to her letter, however, should not form the basis of any wider generalisation. Her problems were probably rooted in personality issues as much as anything, and her films are admired in Eastern Europe. These two factors probably eased her reinstatement.

Soon after this, *The Apple Game* was made but the strange saga continued. In 1977 it was shown in the market section at the Cannes Festival, entered and then withdrawn from competition at Berlin and refused to London. By the summer of 1978, however, it had been shown in Paris to press acclaim, was actively promoted at Karlovy Vary and entered for the New York festival. With Menzel's *Seclusion Near a Forest* (1976) and Hanák's *Rose-Tinted Dreams* (1976), it is one of the few recent Czech films that share the imagination, wit and humanity of the 60s 'Wave'.

Given the circumstances, it is not surprising that *The Apple Game* is the most orthodox of Chytilová's films and presented in a conventional narrative format. Made without Krumbachová and Kučera, it has a story, character development, and sheers away from pure formal experiment. None the less, it cuts through the compromises of the previous six years with a refreshing vigour. The credit sequence reveals that she has lost none of her flair. It begins with a black screen and the crying of a baby. There are close-ups of trees, the camera jerking back and forth to single out an apple. There are apples in boxes, huge close-ups, and images of rotting apples. The sequence is accompanied by the panting of a woman giving birth and the counting of a doctor.

The scene in the maternity hospital that follows moves immediately from red apples to the blood-covered head of a baby emerging from the womb. A rapid montage brings together impressionistic images: faces in the delivery room, apples, the doctor's car, a tray of orange slices, close-ups of chemical liquids, the head of a baby being born, a room full of new-born infants. It ends with the feeding of the baby and a huge close-up of milk being expressed from a nipple. The net effect is one of surprise and shock. The apples of the credits clearly link with the openings of Chytilová's two previous films, with connotations of paradise and the game between men and women. The aesthetic presentation of the physicality of birth gives the whole film a frank and feminist aura bound to upset any puritanical bureaucrat.

It is against this background that Chytilová introduces her fairly routine story of a new nurse, Anna, who is seduced and made

pregnant by the philandering Dr. John (played by Jiří Menzel). The 'game' initially involves his rejection of her, but ends with her rejection of him and decision to have the baby on her own. Chytilová takes this theme, laces it with some good feminist principles and plays the whole thing as a farce.

The film's feminism is marked, among other things, by the fact that Dr. John is still dependent on his mother to look after him. In one scene he protests to his mistress that he is only a 'normal' man. She tells him that she doesn't want a normal man since it means 'dirty dishes and dirty laundry'. When he finally offers to marry Anna, she replies, 'Do you want a washing machine?' There is no real attempt to probe beneath these stereotyped positions, which are used as a springboard for the film's farcical 'game', the sense of which is constantly reinforced by reference to a cabaret song performed by the heroine of *The Fruit of Paradise*. References to Chytilová's earlier work are reinforced when John imagines he sees Anna in Wenceslas Square. It turns out to be Marie II, who claims that he delivered her child.

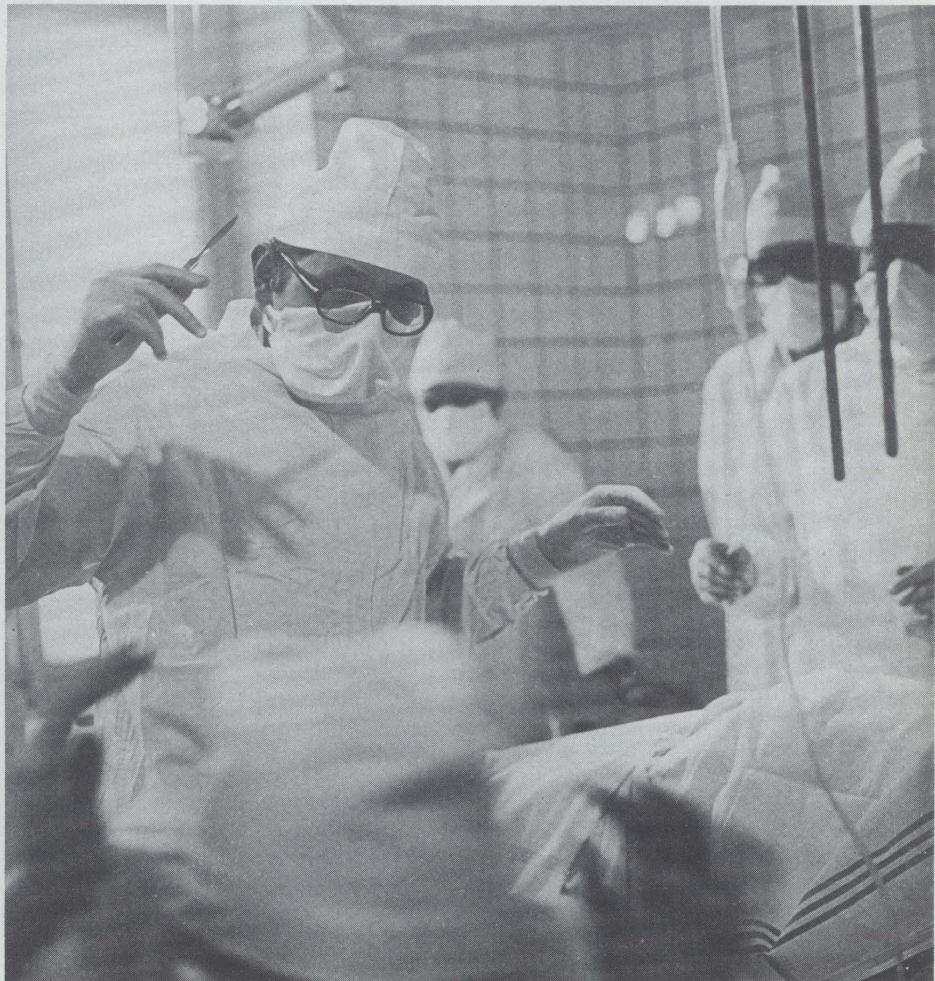
There are a number of light swipes at contemporary society. An intellectual newspaper seller offers his own comments on the news. Empty slogans are attacked through a sardonic reference to 'peace' in the delivery room and 'progress' in the labour room. John also tries to excuse his professional and personal behaviour by reference to his 'objective problems'. Like the old man in *Seclusion Near a Forest*, Anna is interested in fairy tales. In her case it is Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, with its attacks

on the abuse of power, business, knowledge and its assertion that 'it is only with the heart that one can see rightly...'

Despite its fundamentally serious subject, *The Apple Game* is fun and it is difficult to see why anyone should seriously object to it. On the other hand, by the standards of Czech film-making in the 70s, the film is disjunctive and irreverent, breaking the bland reinforcements of academic film-making. Its disjunctive form, use of montage, cabaret interludes and search for the unexpected, turn it into a mild reflection of Chytilová's earlier films. There is some genuine controversy—but it is primarily through the presentation of a female view of sex in which physicality and farce substitute for euphemism and titillation.

It would be nice to think that Chytilová might now resume her career where she left it in 1969. It is unlikely, however, that she will again be allowed to stray so far from illusionist norms. As it is, her films have been very much in the forefront of modernist cinema. There have been influences on her work from Western Europe, but the traffic has by no means been one way. Better than anything, the controversy/popularity of her films has demonstrated the extent to which her anti-illusionist approach poses a threat to established cultural values. The nature of that threat lies in drawing attention to the fact that films do not mirror 'reality' and presenting them in a form that will provoke thought and interaction. In the circumstances, Godard's view in his film *Pravda* (1969) that 'Chytilová = Zanuck + Paramount' seems more than usually perverse. ■

'The Apple Game'



'TOWARDS UTOPIA, BY WAY OF RESEARCH, DETACHMENT AND INVOLVEMENT'

Tony Mitchell

THE TAVIANI BROTHERS

Below: The 'Magic Recorder' sequence in 'Il Prato'

In a large room in an eighteenth century villa cluttered with coloured pictures and posters, and patchwork and papier-mâché puppets, a waif-like, girlish figure is conducting a lesson on film animation with a group of children. Outside a storm is raging. As the thunder and lightning reach a crescendo, the glass doors leading to the garden smash open and an oak tree crashes into the room. The teacher tunes the children's fear into an impromptu discussion about what they would do if they were caught in a flood, and gradually an atmosphere of calm and security filters into the room. The teacher is played by Isabella Rossellini, daughter of Roberto Rossellini and Ingrid Bergman, in her first film performance; the film is *Il Prato* (*The Meadow*), the eighth and most recent feature by the brothers Vittorio and Paolo Taviani.





Paolo and Vittorio Taviani with Isabella Rossellini

This sequence shows a measured development of the Taviani brothers' psychological-political-agrarian confrontation of the relationship between people and the land they inhabit, almost replaying in an affirmative key the traumatic opening sequence of *Padre Padrone*, where Gavino's father interrupts the school lesson to drag his son back to the hills, and the switch he carries becomes an emblem of the brutal domination of the *padroni* of the land over their peasant vassals, like the clog tree of Olmi's *Albero degli Zoccoli*. The teacher's reaction to the fallen oak tree in *Il Prato* suggests that a more gentle and sympathetic response to the forces of nature can impart a more vital understanding of the positive tutelage they have to offer.

Shot in the Tuscan countryside, *Il Prato*, besides featuring a father-son relationship based on reciprocal respect and affection, examines the possibilities of realising what could be termed Utopian ideals in the agrarian context of developing a direct understanding of the land as a source of spiritual and material nourishment. Enzo (Michele Placido), an agriculture graduate, is enamoured by the equilibrium and balance of the Tuscan countryside. After trying without success to integrate himself into an agricultural commune, he is forced to find work in a supermarket. Eugenia (Isabella Rossellini) has a degree in archaeology, but works in a post office. Her passion is children's theatre and cinema, and in the course of the film she stages a children's fable, 'Il Pifferaio Magico' ('The Magic Recorder'), with her children, using the fields and piazzas of San Gimignano as her stage. Enzo and Eugenia decide to try to weld their interests together and take over an abandoned country villa. The tranquillity of their creative retreat is broken by Giovanni (Saverio Marconi, Gavino in *Padre Padrone*), a former law student about to become a magistrate, but whose real passion is for the cinema. He and Eugenia form an attachment, born of their common interests, and the film develops this uneasy *ménage à trois*. The landscape of San Gimignano is used as a base for the conflicting emotions of the three isolated, aspiring protagonists, whose shared dilemma is taken up from the point which Gavino had reached at the conclusion of *Padre Padrone*.

With the 1978 Silver Ribbon award by the Italian film critics for *Padre Padrone*, and its screening on television to a record audience of nearly 17 million, the Taviani brothers have finally emerged into the front line of contemporary Italian directors. The belatedness of this success was amply testified at the end of last year in a rare opportunity to assess

their complete work through a television retrospective of six of the seven feature films they have directed since 1961, under the authors' blanket title of 'Research, Invention and Spectacle'.

'By the expression "cinema of research",' they have stated, 'we also mean a cinema which finds what it is searching for, even if it only uncovers the reasons behind the research, and confirms or undermines or even negates them. In order to find the open road ahead, one has to try out a hundred wrong tracks. This means that there has to be a guaranteed area of risk, because research implies risk, in the sense of the violation of received ideas, compromises, in fact everything we know.'

With *Il Prato*, the Taviani brothers show signs of having started out along the 'open road' they describe, not only in the narrow sense of having moved into the realm of mainstream budget production (*Il Prato* was made on a budget of less than £700,000, one-fifth of which was put up by RAI, the Italian television network, compared to *Padre Padrone*, which cost less than a third of that figure). In a larger sense, they have reached a position where they have the means to explore more fully the uninterrupted process of political, social and psychological research they have undertaken since their first decisive step in 1960, when they gave up making documentaries to concentrate on the invention and spectacle of fiction. In their films, which they see in terms of a continuous linear development, variations on a single film, the Tavianis always function as a single unit, working in tandem, and continuously alternating on every stage of the filming process, from developing the screenplay and choosing a location right up to the editing and dubbing. When they give interviews their points of view are interchangeable, and no attempt is made in their printed form to distinguish one brother's statements from the other's. On the set, they work collectively, a co-operation which includes the actors, some of whom in the past have been members of their own family and unpaid friends and comrades. Searching for individual signatures is fruitless. 'They are never authoritarian,' Isabella Rossellini has commented, 'there is always a collective participation in the construction of the film.'

The Taviani brothers' interest in the cinema began in 1948, after seeing Rossellini's *Paisa*. (In their 1968 film, *Under the Sign of Scorpio*, there is a direct quotation from *Paisa* in the scene where a group of women, with hands bound, leap into the water like Rossellini's partisans.) They met Valentino Orsini and began a collaboration with him, first as codirector and screenwriter and later as producer. They began to explore the road of neo-realism opened up by Rossellini, first in the form of slice-of-life, viva voce theatre pieces ('neo-realism with a pinch of Meyerhold and Brecht'), set in their birthplace, San Miniato, near Pisa. One of these early plays, *Delio*, the story of a bourgeois musicologist and art critic who attempts to break out of his class barriers, marrying a peasant's daughter and joining the Communist party, was revived in 1975 as a radio play, *Ruffo '60*, and performed on Italian radio under the direction of the authors, who built it up 'rather like the soundtrack of a film'. After the trauma of

events in Hungary, Ruffo-Delio becomes estranged from wife, mother and party, in an unsuccessful and finally fatal effort to find a semblance of order in his own life. As such, he is the prototype of a long line of Taviani protagonists whose artistic and political aspirations are out of joint with the historical, political and material forces of their environment, with most notable resemblances to Fulvio, the high born revolutionary who betrays his comrades in *Allonsonfan* (1973-74).

After working in the 50s as assistants to various minor directors in Rome, also participating in an unrealised Rossellini project, and as screenwriters, notably on an unrealised film version of Italo Svevo's novel *As a Man Grows Older*, the Taviani brothers directed a number of documentaries between 1955 and 1960. These culminated in *Italy is not a Poor Country*, made in collaboration with Joris Ivens. The brothers shot the final episode of the Ivens film in Sicily, where they had previously done research for a documentary about the famous Sicilian trade union leader Salvatore Carnevale, assassinated by the Mafia some years earlier. The Tavianis considered the Ivens film as more of a fiction work than a documentary, and decided to embark on their own fiction film, based on the life of Carnevale, *Un Uomo da Bruciare* (*A Man for the Stake*, 1961-62), with Gian Maria Volonté in his cinematic debut.

They were quick to implement the theatrical lessons of Brecht—just as *Ruffo '60* has a detached, impersonal and ironic narrative style, so the protagonist of *Un Uomo da Bruciare* was treated in an ironic, often belittling mode, as an anti-hero, awkward, arrogant and messianic almost to the point of megalomania, in the context of a homage to 'neo-realism, the Resistance, and the post-war peasants' and workers' movement'. Alienation, detachment, and also a self-conscious presentational theatricality: Salvatore, a 'man with a cinema in his head', envisages his own death in a series of flash-forwards, and orates to the peasants in verse from the stage of a theatre. Also, an epic, 'choral' use of long-shot and tracking shot to depict the peasants' way of life and mode of work—their occupation of a farm under Salvatore's guidance, their labour in the mines, and the final mass demonstration at Salvatore's funeral.

Sequences such as these move beyond the limits of neo-realism to a more expressionist visual examination of the relation of the peasants to the land. They follow the lead of *Paisa*, 'a work which goes beyond the definition of neo-realism—it is not just a film about the Resistance, but also, because of the kind of framing it uses, and its long tracking shots, a film about the struggle between man and nature. It is probably this preference for long tracking shots that we have retained most.' Along with this stylistic objectification there is a deeply rooted, sympathetic treatment of the land, and the peasants' encounters with the Mafia, who are treated throughout in a de-mystified, unglamorised and unstylised way. In short, there is a strong sense of sympathetic involvement with their characters, which cuts across the distancing techniques they have adopted from Brecht.

'As far as Italian culture is concerned,' they say, 'Brecht represents a de-provincialisation, and to us in particular, a violent refusal of naturalism and even neo-realism... .

Alienation and detachment we go along with. But we're also Neapolitans, which means we're all for a totally expressive, expansive viscerality which is not exactly Brechtian... So we swing between moments of great detachment from the material we treat to other moments of considerable involvement.'

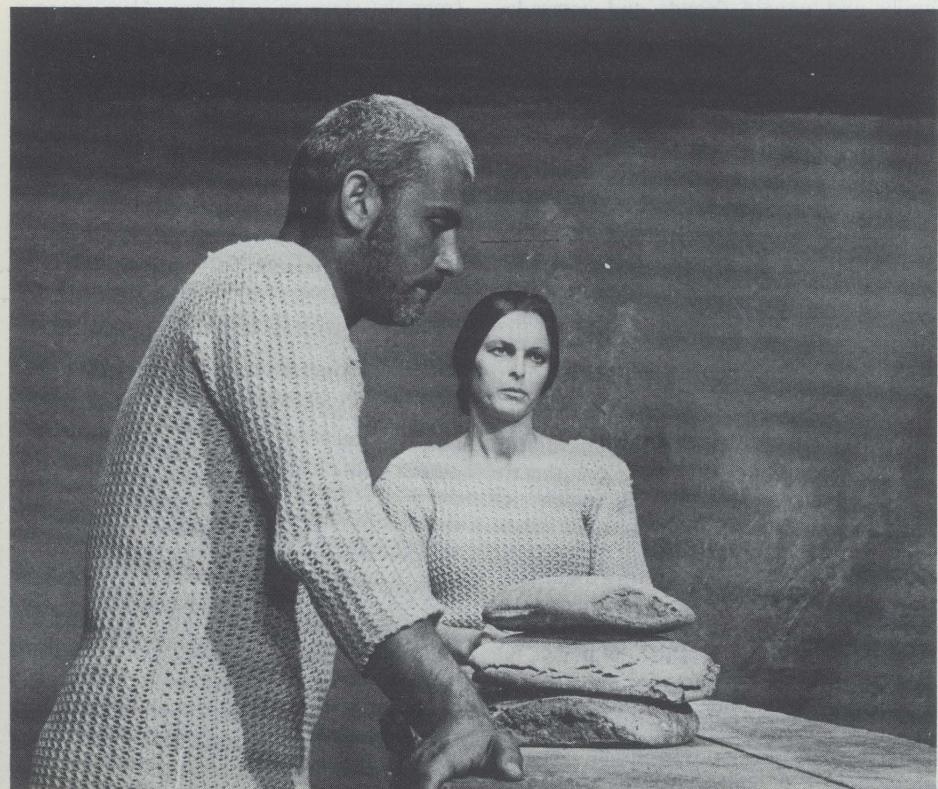
The Tavianis take care to distinguish realism from naturalism, and already in *Un Uomo da Bruciare* there are signs of this dialectical interplay between emotional realism and epic theatricality which is increasingly to characterise their work. Their second feature film, however, was more in the way of a diversion. Based on the MP Luigi Renato

Sansone's project to reform the outmoded Italian divorce laws, and the only film in which they did not have complete artistic control over both screenplay and finished product, *I Fuorilegge del Matrimonio* (*Marital Criminals*, 1963), has virtually been disowned by its directors. It was excluded from the television retrospective, as being outside the political scope of their other films, not 'linked to classical roots and tending towards the epic'. The presence of actors like Ugo Tognazzi, Annie Girardot and Romolo Valli in two of the five separate episodes which make up the film ensured it, ironically, some degree of popular success.

There is a wide variety of experiment in the film, ranging from the documentary-like prologue, set in a mental asylum, where a young woman inmate fails to recognise her husband, taking him for a doctor, to the final sequence, mixing subjective fantasy and objective reality and set in the Holy See, where a woman married to an American soldier who has divorced her and returned home is unable to obtain an annulment of her marriage from the Catholic Church. The film has a minimal propagandist function, in so far as each episode is part of a 'series of absurd cases seen as a mirror of a vast absurdity'; as in the episode where a woman is kept prisoner, naked, in a tower by her brother for infidelity to her husband, who is serving a life sentence in prison. But this is confined to a vein of light comedy rather remote from the serious political inquiry contained in the Tavianis' subsequent work.



Above: the peasants take over the farm in '*Un Uomo da Bruciare*'. Below: Gian Maria Volonté and Lucia Bose in '*Sotto il Segno dello Scorpione*'



I Fuorilegge del Matrimonio led to a period of self-assessment, continued research and various unrealised projects (including a *Decameron*, scuttled by Pasolini's project), until in August 1964 the brothers were commissioned by the Italian Communist Party, together with a number of other directors (including Pasolini, who interpolated footage into *Uccellacci e Uccellini*), to film the funeral of Palmiro Togliatti, the PCI's leader and co-founder with Gramsci. From this footage, the Tavianis gradually developed *Sovversivi* (*Subversives*, 1967), mixing documentary fact and speculative fiction, 'in the hope that it would be difficult to distinguish between the two', to confront directly the themes arising from the sense of a crucial turning point in Italian political life and the feeling of stagnation resulting from the passing of an era. The film anticipates the explosion of overtly (and frequently glossy) political cinema after 1968.

Sovversivi traces the separate but parallel liberating personal crises of four militant Communist observers of the funeral. Ermanno (played by the prominent folk-singer Lucio Dalla), a philosophy graduate, is in the process of breaking with his family background to devote himself to photography, and proclaims his belief in an imminent Communist revolution to all comers. Giulia, the wife of a Communist party official, decides to 'come out' and explore her lesbian inclinations. Ettore (Giulio Brogi), an exiled Venezuelan revolutionary, who 'claims Utopia as a moment of truth—history is not just development, it's also discontinuity, negation; it doesn't just happen, it invents itself', compares the situation in Italy to that in Venezuela, where he decides to return to take the place of a comrade who has died in the struggle against the dictatorship. And Ludovico, in some ways a self-conscious mirror image of the directors, who is working on a non-commercial film about Leonardo da Vinci, decides that 'art is not enough—it repels you, makes you want to give it all up and go out and mingle with the people.' He abandons the literary structure of his film to concentrate on images of liberation, a process which parallels that of *Sovversivi* itself, in its demonstration through image and action of the possibility of going beyond discussion to active change.

The quartet of protagonists are 'subversive' because their revolutionary fervour takes them beyond the constraints of ideology,

history and environment into the sphere of personal action, inventing their own histories, in the absence of a coherent, organised mass political movement, instead of being passive spectators to its conditioning processes. Thus the final image of the film, that of Togliatti's coffin being lowered into the grave, is presented coldly and unemotionally as a historical terminal point which has been shown to have been superseded by the positive and imaginative decisions of the four subversives.

The Taviani brothers' next film strips away all remaining vestiges of neo-realism and proceeds into the more overtly epic, choral and mythical area of prehistory, allegory and metaphor. Its political context, however, remains the same as that of *Sovversivi*—the student revolution of 1968, and the conflict between the old and new left, showing the atavistic, ritualistic consequences of spontaneous political action fed by Utopian ideals. The Scorpionids in *Sotto il Segno dello Scorpione* (*Under the Sign of Scorpio*, 1968-69) are the natural heirs of the subversives of the previous film, and their leader is played by the actor who played Ettore. Taking their desires for realities, the Scorpionids, a group of young refugees with revolutionary ideals fleeing from a volcanic eruption, arrive on a volcanic island inhabited by a peaceable community of farmers under the domination of a king, Renno (Gian Maria Volonté), who has brought about his own revolution of sorts some time before. Instead of individual protagonists, however, we have a study of mass groups in terms of a struggle for survival and organised political autonomy. The Scorpionids try to persuade the islanders to go to the mainland with them and thereby escape further threat of volcanic eruption. The encounter between the two communities culminates in a violent unleashing of atavistic forces, resulting in the Scorpionids killing the farmers and raping their women before departing for the mainland to build their new Jerusalem. Through the expressionistic, epic mythologisation of the physical environment of the island, full of latent and ominously disruptive forces, Utopia is seen to take the form of a concrete goal, the mainland, which justifies any means, but also as an end which is presented here, as elsewhere in the Tavianis' films, with a strong measure of ironic detachment. When asked about this Utopian strain in their films, the Taviani brothers have stated:

'To us Utopia is a project that is perhaps realisable in a distant future. But this doesn't mean it's a delirious escape. The mere fact of examining reality with reference to a different project indicates that one is no longer inclined to accept it passively...' (1978)

'In a reality such as ours in Europe, where subversion cannot be conceived of except in terms of a lengthy process, the revolutionary impulse takes on the appearance of a Utopian fable. Utopia, but not escape. There exists a need to uncover a present reality which runs the risk of being hidden in the focus of long-term perspectives and imagined desires for the future.' (1971)

'We see Utopia as an operative project, an indication of something which has yet to come about, but comes into being by dint of its necessity. Utopia is a reference point we work towards.' (1974)



'Allonsonfan'

The somewhat dissenting, contradictory note of the middle quotation reflects the dialectical conception behind *Scorpio*, which counterbalances historical determinism with the idealistic but sympathetically portrayed option of forcibly inventing a new history, even to the point of unleashing violence. The harsh, almost guerrilla-like aspects of the film's style, with its soundtrack a cacophony of fragmented cries and strident noises, strikes an intentionally grating, uncomfortable note, frequently obliterating dialogue, and reinforcing the strategy of the islanders when they try to terrorise the refugees by simulating the sounds of an earthquake. Such devices, together with the use of black-outs between episodes, and the restriction of a narrow palette of earthy greens, browns, greys and blues in the Tavianis' first film in colour, to depict the land as an unsown, unfriendly and animistic force, amount to a distancing effect rendered literal in the use of long-shots and tracking shots to reduce the death of the father figure Renno to insignificance.

The critic Pietro Toesca has described the style of the Tavianis' film as 'Utopian realism'; and this apparent contradiction in terms pinpoints the way that the linguistic structure of their films, while presenting their characters' idyllic reconstructions of the future, always grounds them in a realistically presented failure and fatality. In *Scorpio* the Utopian dreams of the Scorpionids are given an overtly theatrical form when they devise an exaggerated spectacle, mixing melodrama and grotesque elements with mime and choral effects, to put across their vision to the farmers. Rutolo, like the Player King in *Hamlet*, identifies with his role to such an extent that he cries real tears and the play breaks down. From its ashes they devise a second spectacle, abandoning verbal argument altogether in a joyous, rhythmical dance which, while sowing the ritualistic seeds of the subsequent slaughter, proved as much a process of self-discovery for the actors, largely unpaid students and left-wing mil-

itants who, 'despite their scepticism about the usefulness of the cinema and art in general, momentarily abandoned themselves to the rhythm and joy of Utopia.' Reality is decoded and momentarily supplanted by the revolutionary impulse in all its Dionysian fury, through which future possibilities are glimpsed.

'Long live those who exaggerate, they really get to the heart of things!' cries Ettore in *Sovversivi*, before he goes off to an almost certain and useless death in Venezuela. And Giulio, the protagonist of the brothers' next film, *San Michele aveva un Gallo* (*St. Michael Had a Rooster*, 1971, a line from a nonsense song Giulio sings as a child when he is locked in a dark room for punishment), commits suicide when he is given a glimpse of the future revolution by a group of doomed young radicals. 'If *Scorpio* was a Utopian film, *San Michele* is a post-Utopian film, a reflection on Utopia,' the brothers have stated.

San Michele's low-budget, independently financed predecessors, often relying on the unpaid support of family and friends, suffered the consequences of inadequate, 'contraband' distribution, while maintaining the advantages of total artistic self-management and avoiding the ideological clash between means and message which characterises many political films of the time (Pontecorvo, Costa-Gavras and Elio Petri, for example). With *San Michele*, the Taviani brothers began a production relationship with RAI, and the film did the rounds of the international festivals, being judged as 'the best Italian film of the past ten years' at Venice in 1973. But ironically *San Michele* scarcely had any subsequent commercial distribution, and relied on a clandestine circuit until its distribution was taken over, together with all the previous films, by ARCI, the Italian Communist Party's cultural organisation.

Loosely based on Tolstoy's story *The Human and the Divine*, which it sets in

nineteenth century Italy, *San Michele* presents three episodes from the life of Giulio Manieri (Giulio Brogi once again), an international anarchist of bourgeois origins who leads a political propaganda campaign into the Umbrian countryside. Greeted with fear and indifference by the peasants, Giulio is condemned to death but later has his sentence commuted to life. We see him during ten years of isolation, 'projecting' images from his childhood and his political fantasies on to the prison walls. While he is being transferred by boat to another prison, another boatload of prisoners passes, a group of revolutionaries from the new generation, and an uneasy dialogue begins. The youths have moved beyond Giulio's spontaneous anarchism towards an attempt to construct a workers' movement based on scientific principles. They accuse him of self-indulgence and tell him he has 'held up the birth of the workers' movement by at least fifteen years.' Although Giulio rejects their ideas, he is inwardly convinced that they are right; rather than begin again at the beginning, he leaps into the water.

The emblematic, dialectical sequence of the two boats reflects not only the passage from anarchism to Marxism, from Utopian socialism to a scientifically based socialism, but also the transition from the spontaneity of the 1968 generation to a more rigorous, organised workers' movement. 'We are on Giulio's side, but we're also on the other side, on the other boat,' the Taviani brothers have said. 'Or perhaps neither. We'd prefer to be on a third boat, still to be discovered, where Giulio's imagination is united with the more scientific inclinations of the other boat.' *San Michele* confronts the residual consequences of the Utopian vision—the conflict between an active, subjective and creative individual and the objective, biological and historical factors which make him a political anachronism. Like Salvatore in *Un Uomo da Bruciare* and Ettore in *Sovversivi*, Giulio is an 'exaggerator', a dreamer who aggrandises his own actions through the medium of an artistically based fantasy, which allows him to conjure up a sequence from Bellini's *Norma* from a candle flame in his cell, but also mentally to rerun his political campaigns towards a successful outcome: 'Our expeditions have been successful. The peasants are marching with us. The new future has arrived. The young people elect me president and I refuse. There should be no leaders. I withdraw and disappear. I disguise myself and work with the people, make myself talked about, and listen to what is said about me.'

This is a vision markedly similar to that which Fulvio, the protagonist of *Allonsonfan* (1973–74), is taken in by at the hands of the film's eponymous Utopian antagonist. Just as Giulio runs aground on the shifting tide of historical change, so Fulvio is propelled first into betrayal, then into a false espousal of his comrades' cause, by the historically anomalous position he is trapped in. As another comrade he has driven to suicide tells him in a fantasy apparition: 'You have understood, Fulvio, something which we never dared to think about. We've come either too late or too soon. You've rebelled against this by sinking into regression, and you've fallen out of the frying pan into the fire.'

The 'exaggeration' involved in a vision of a revolutionary Utopia is built into the

presentational structure of *Allonsonfan*; self-reflexive theatricality abounds in the film's half-operatic, half-Brechtian format, along with more popular commercial overtones. Financed by RAI, and with actors like Mastrianni (Fulvio), Mimsy Farmer and Laura Betti, the film reached a more above-ground, commercial circuit without reducing its directors' political bite, since its glossy, melodramatic format is continually ironically underscored. Right from the title sequence, which is projected on to a red stage curtain to the accompaniment of an orchestra tuning up, there is a deliberate, self-conscious theatricality.

Fulvio, a revolutionary of aristocratic origins and a member of a sect called the 'Sublime Brotherhood', is the unwilling protagonist of a tragical-farcical plot. Released from prison after refusing to betray his comrades, he is immediately whisked off by the Brotherhood, disguised as stretcher-bearers, to be accused of betraying their leader, who is later found to have committed suicide. Disillusioned and ill, Fulvio seeks refuge with his family, disguising himself as a monk to test their reaction to him after twenty years absence. He convalesces in the peace of country life, singing nonsensical arias with his sister, until the Brotherhood, disguised as hunters, coerce him into an expedition to the south to lead the peasants in their struggle against hunger, cholera and religious repression. To the strains of the Marseillaise (which the film's title echoes), the Brotherhood, in brilliant red tunics, march towards the peasants across the stony, barren ground, unaware that Fulvio has betrayed them to the parish priest. In the ensuing slaughter, signalled by Fulvio taking off his red jacket, only Allonsonfan, the youngest, most ardent and most Utopian of the Brotherhood, survives, and deliriously recounts to Fulvio how their campaign has been successful and the peasants have united with them in a dance of joyous celebration (which is actually presented more in the vein of a frenetic St. Vitus' dance). Duped by Allonsonfan's vision, Fulvio dons his red coat and is shot as a rebel.

We see Allonsonfan carry on across the fields, the representative of a Utopian future, a road of hope transforming an absurd reality, in which he is already living out the impossible future he has envisaged. In this context the land takes on a mythical dimension, a constant reminder of the forces to be overcome to bring about a peasants' revolution: 'The land is a constant presence in our films. It occurs in its most disturbing aspect as far as Italians are concerned—the South. The South seen as an unresolved national problem, an epic, if not mythical estate, the coagulation of the expressive forces conditioning our future. One could say the South is rather like our Moby Dick.'

It is from this mythologised, land-bound Leviathan that *Padre Padrone* (1976–77) achieves some of its more heightened, affirmative moments, like the whimsical 'springtime love' sequence in which an anarchic bestiality is celebrated on a grand scale. But it is also the hills of Sardinia, as much as Gavino's father, which represent a brutally paternalistic conditioning process in Gavino's school of hard knocks. Where *Padre Padrone* touches a raw nerve in the context of Italian political realities is in its

treatment of the third world conditions in the south of Italy, a problem which is at the root of all the Taviani brothers' films from *Un Uomo da Bruciare* to *Il Prato*. The protagonists of *Il Prato* link up from where Gavino leaves off, attempting to reconcile the aspirations of their education with a desire to commune with the land and create their own artistic-individual histories, as the first step towards a political autonomy in which the land can be used in a fertile, positive way instead of functioning as a force of alienation and repression. For while Gavino is shown travelling along a road almost Utopian in its conception, from silence, isolation and ostracism towards education, socialisation and self-determination by means of language acquired as a tool of self-awareness (his knowledge of Latin and Italian enables him to write a thesis on his local dialect), his compulsion to return to his roots brings him back full circle, to further isolation and ostracism, and a need to begin anew.

This circle is emphasised by the appearance of Gavino Ledda at the beginning and end of the film, and particularly in his silent, rocking motion, an almost primitive form of comfort which uncannily evokes that of the wolf-boy in Truffaut's *L'Enfant Sauvage*. Like Truffaut, the Taviani brothers see their film as a triumphant affirmation of education and socialisation, but in both cases an opposite reading is possible. Like Kaspar Hauser, the wolf boy and Gavino lose an atavistic spontaneity in the process of socialisation, while exposing the defects and absurdities of disciplinary notions of human nature and capabilities. But it is Gavino's victory over his father's brutal tutelage in survival against the laws of the land which constitutes the film's affirmative viewpoint and gives it a political weight—Gavino's father is a successor to Togliatti in *Sovversivi* and King Renno in *Scorpio*, the embodiment of an authoritarianism against which the Tavianis' protagonists struggle to assert their emancipation. And it is no coincidence that the Taviani brothers also make use of this father-son matrix on a stylistic plane, in describing their rapport with the neo-realism of Rossellini: 'Our relationship with neo-realism is a love-hate, father-son relationship. Originating from a much loved and admired father, we have subsequently negated it with the ungrateful violence of sons who realise themselves only in so far as they destroy their father.'

It is also no coincidence that Isabella Rossellini plays the character in *Il Prato* who comes closest to realising her Utopian aspirations in the form of a film of a children's fable set against the meadows of Tuscany, reflecting the Taviani brothers' own concern with using the Italian countryside as the setting for their political and social visions, and their continual engagement in a 'subversive', anti-authoritarian cinema, asserting youth and vitality in an affirmative, revolutionary context. Through the dialectical presentation in image and action of the possibilities for self-determination through political action, they play off Utopian idealism against an ironic, self-regarding detachment, personal fantasy against a constant resort to the agrarian contours of an objective, physical reality, while the emotive, stylistic sweep of their films is always rooted in painstaking, rational research. ■

META-FILM AND POINT OF VIEW



Reflection of Clive Langham (Gielgud); photograph of his wife, Molly

ALAIN RESNAIS' PROVIDENCE

William F. Van Wert

Alain Resnais' *Providence* (1977, his first English language film, written/scripted by David Mercer) is a meta-film, a film about the making of films, a work of art about the fabricating of art works. It would fit nicely in the framework of the reader-response critics in literature (Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, Edward Said), with their distinction between the implied reader within the work and the actual reader.* It is a film dependent more upon the mechanics of the medium than upon any simple mimesis.

Before going any further, some distinguishing characteristics of the meta-film might be

helpful. Because a meta-film implies a simultaneous observation of the world and a meditation on itself, there is an unspoken tension, never resolved, within the work. Or, if resolved, it is only because the two functions have converged. The final scene of *Providence* is the only 'pure' scene in the film. We meet the real offspring of Clive Langham (John Gielgud), famous writer, liberated for the first time from his creative imagination. That liberation also implies the old man's death. The release of tension, on a structural level, comes from the fact that the spectator finally observes the author whose meditation is ended. If we use the mathematical construct of a topology, we have moved from the *inside* to the *outside* without, however, any change in the overall structure itself: Clive Langham has not changed personalities; his children are no better off in the 'real' world than they are in his mind; and his death is still inevitable.

Meta-films must of necessity appear as embryonic works, incomplete because they emphasise process over fact. Part of the sense of incompleteness derives from the fact that

there is usually a failed artist at the centre of the work.† The meditation (the film itself) reaches an uneasy and often arbitrary conclusion, because the work-within-the-work, the commentary on the medium itself, is never resolved or finalised. Another part of the sense of incompletion derives from the different levels of reality/imagination within the work, which create a 'surplus' of readings for the spectator. In a sense, a structure of less than whole within the work determines a participation on the part of the viewer of more than whole.

Clive Langham is an old man dying and a creative writer creating. His vision contaminates everything else in *Providence*. His

* I find it interesting that discussions about meta-films or meta-fictions are becoming increasingly frequent in a kind of co-existence with reader-response criticism, since both are ways of talking about the text in a context, the one in conjunction with the creator, the other in conjunction with the reader. And, of course, the danger in both is that the criticism tends to serve itself, while the text becomes a pretext. Some recent writing about meta-fiction, however, is extremely interesting in its application to film.

† The French New Wave seems to have duplicated the Romantic Hero in its predilection for failed artists at the centre of the work. Jean-Luc Godard is, of course, the meta-film-maker *par excellence* with *Le Mépris*, *Vent d'Est*, *Tout Va Bien* and *Numéro Deux* as the major meta-films. *Numéro Deux* is perhaps the most personal and poignant of all meta-films, since the failed artist at the end is Godard himself, cramped and alone in the projection booth, the film reels in disarray all around him.

mind moves the other characters: they say the lines he gives them, they do what they are told. And the double role that Langham plays extends to all the other characters as well, so that they re-enact both his fantasies and his past experiences, even his nightmares, but never their own fantasies, experiences or nightmares. The result is that the spectator must constantly re-identify the characters in a symbolic way: in one scene, Helen is Molly and Claude, Clive's son, plays Clive talking about Clive. Not all meta-films are this relativistic in their Freudian musical chairs of identity. The point is, though, that they could be. The structure itself of meditation/observation provides for an apparently inexhaustible series of combinations and divergences, variations and permutations.

There is often a very complex game of mirrors or Chinese boxes or *mise-en-abîme* pockets to be played in a meta-film. Whatever one chooses to call it, one is confronted with a working out of the process of film-making within the narrative of the film, and those statements about film within the film function as *holes* in the surface narrative: holes which at first glance seem to impede the narrative as fiction but which, upon closer examination, are the integral sewing to the narrative, the gaps over which one cannot 'edit' or splice together an otherwise simple story.

One can't, for example, imagine Godard's *Contempt* (1963) as a study in relationships apart from the film being made/not being made within the film. The relationships between characters are ultimately explainable only in terms of the film-making context which binds the characters. Likewise, one can't imagine Agnès Varda's *Les Créatures* (1966) as a narrative about a man waiting for his wife to give birth. Without the recognition of the husband as creator creating, there is no more narrative left. At the same time, the meditation/observation superimposition allows for divergent, sometimes contradictory, readings of the film. On the surface level, the husband's behaviour in *Les Créatures* is that of a man evading the responsibilities of his situation: he just isn't there for his pregnant wife. But, within the overall context of the meta-film, he is in fact confronting his situation: he deals with fatherhood (creation) in his own terms (the writer creating). The wife as mute writing messages for him reinforces his equation of lived reality with written reality. Causality becomes a function of composition.

The meta-film posits composition as its major metaphor, but in a very particular dynamic. The metaphor is both a Chinese box (hole) within the film and the entirety or ensemble of the film. As such, it is both smaller and larger than the pretext surface-narrative. And because of this duality, it pulls us (spectators) out of the narrative, whereas a structure of, say, multiple flashbacks (in particular, flashbacks within flashbacks, as in *Out of the Past*—1947) would serve to draw us deeper into the surface narrative, even though these flashbacks are also 'holes' in an otherwise linear narrative. The basic difference is, I think, one of point of view. The holes created by flashbacks within flashbacks align us with the point of view of one of the characters in the film. The holes in a meta-film align us with the director of the film we are watching, even when expressed through a 'creator' character within the film we are watching.

It should be clear, then, that meta-films imply a falsification process which we as spectators and as co-creators agree to, even to the extent of passing the impostor for the real thing: thought experience as lived experience. Put another way, the meta-film is a way of disguising first-person narration as third-person, subjective experience as objective experiment. That falsification is augmented when the creator within the work is a writer and not a film-maker, for the words are immediately rendered as images. In the hands of a Resnais or a Robbe-Grillet or a Godard, there is no more need for visual cues to the subjective (whirling camera movement or close-up with blurred image or any other image-designated digression from the here and now of the narrative). Scenes which are visually objective (which is to say, potential) often turn out to be memories, dreams, imaginings, lies or staged re-enactments of the real scene (the 'proper' visuals). And the degree to which we can grasp the 'real' scene or reconstruct the proper sequence is dependent on the degree to which we are aware of (co-conspirators in) the falsification. Obviously, then, meta-films will appear as puzzle-films to those who are unwilling to see the viewing process as a dialectic between composition and revision.

Resnais' *Provvidence* is an interesting meta-film, because it provides a kind of end-game to the form. Unlike Godard's *Contempt*, in which the film-within-the-film finds its proper place (the 'story' holds together by its various sewn parts), Resnais' film is an example of montage as total *découpage*, the meta-film gobbling up the film itself, contaminating and finally eradicating the surface narrative, until the only thing left at the end of the film is the end of the film. The final scene is the only decontaminated scene and the death of Clive Langham in the story is expressed as the cessation of creation (composition and revision) of Clive Langham as writer. He finally plays out the inescapable role of father, a finite role, one in which he no longer manipulates his children as pawns in a continuing novel in his mind. Everything else is point of view.

There are two ways in which Resnais interrupts the text and imposes his own point of view, both involving the other characters. One is essentially cinematic, the other is literary. There are brief shots, violent in their content, un-narrated by Langham/Gielgud and unassimilated by the rest of the text, which punctuate the soap-opera scenes involving characters speaking to each other. The first such shot is of an apparent madman pursued by soldiers with machine guns. Later, we recognise the madman as Kevin Woodford (David Warner), Langham's bastard son. But that later recognition doesn't alter the abruptness of the original shot nor enrich the original reading of the shot. The shot is totally visual, cinematic, undiluted by any act of interpretation within the film. This and other shots involving the herding together and shooting of old people on a football field 'belong', of course, to Clive Langham. They are images of old age and death: hurried and violent, because Langham cannot comprehend his own death; un-narrated, because they are creations of the imaginary, creations which pop up in Langham's mind, but over which his mind has no control. Expressed in their brute state,

with no voice-over commentary, they represent Langham's point of view as the creator manipulated and totally alone with his fears.

Impending death as repose, both peaceful and desirable, is also expressed uniquely in terms of images. I refer here to the two times in the film when Resnais' familiar forward-travelling camera moves into and over the tops of green trees. These images also stem from Langham's point of view, but again his conscious creating mind has no control over them. They are startling, both for their colour and for their silence.

All other images in which Langham is not visually present, representing the various combinations of Claude Langham (Dirk Bogarde) and Sonia (Ellen Burstyn), Woodford (David Warner) and Helen (Elaine Stritch) and comprising most of the film's screen time, are contaminated in terms of literature more than film (thus the importance of David Mercer's collaboration with Resnais as co-author of the film). Clive Langham, the writer, imposes his point of view on that of his children, in written form: he steals their dialogue. He feeds them their lines. In the beginning, this symbolic superimposition in the dialogue seems to function on a double level: the spoken lines have meaning both in terms of the other characters and in terms of the father meddling in their lives or composing lines for a novel. But, as the scenes repeat themselves and the spatial integrity of the film is lost, we realise that all scenes, except the final scene, are re-enactments of Clive Langham's past, with Claude and Woodford serving as stand-ins for Clive and Sonia and Helen substituting for the absent Molly, who committed suicide.

The process deserves a closer look. In one of the opening sequences, Claude, a lawyer, says to Sonia: 'It'll have to be rewritten.' He refers to a legal paper. However, within the context of the hovering point of view of Clive Langham, the sequence refers as well to Clive's reconstruction of the past, both his and his children's. Significantly, the face of Gielgud/Langham is withheld for the first twenty minutes of the film, reminiscent of the withheld faces of the lovers in *Hiroshima mon Amour* (1959). The point here is that we associate point of view in film with a fixing of attention on characters' faces. We identify present tense, in a way, with the visual fixation on a face representing the whole body, the whole person. Indeed, the person with whom I first saw *Provvidence* whispered to me when Gielgud's face first appeared on screen: 'Now things will really get going.' In fact, the absence of that face (and the corresponding absence of a present tense) are crucial to the successful point of view superimposition, just as the lovers' faces being withheld in the long opening sequences of *Hiroshima mon Amour* established our identification, not with them but with their memories and reconstructions of Hiroshima and Nevers.

The result is that there is an eerie but smooth transition when Clive Langham's voice hollows out, goes to echo on the soundtrack and becomes Sonia's voice, saying to Claude: 'Why are you so bloody obsessed with the fucking astronauts?' In the same way, Claude and Helen meet at her hotel, and their dialogue is really two pitched monologues, both referring to Clive and Molly. Claude and Helen both speak and

continue speaking, with neither's lines having any relation to the other's. Claude: 'You look well.' Helen: 'I'm dying.' And so forth.

When we return to Clive Langham, he announces: 'It's been said about my work that the search for style often results in a loss of feeling. However, I would say, style is feeling in its most elegant and economical way.' The speech is also a doubling device, this time outside of the film, for the same criticism has been applied to all Resnais' films and Clive Langham's answer is, of course, Alain Resnais' answer as well.

As Clive Langham comes full circle upon his failed past and as he approaches the inevitable death of the final scene, the doubling process breaks down. Characters begin to speak out of character, reversing each other's lines and, in some cases, speaking directly to the creator. Claude and Sonia have a fight in the kitchen. Sonia says: 'I'm not a person, I'm a fucking construction. Yours.' Within the limits of the final scene, where we learn that Claude and Sonia have a good, even tender marriage, her response in this scene has to be taken in one of two ways: she is either speaking directly to Clive Langham, character to creator, at the level of composition; or she is speaking the lines that Molly did speak or would have spoken, at the level of Clive Langham, father and failed husband. Indeed in the next scene, Woodford says to Sonia: 'Molly was always fond of wearing gloves like that in the summer.' The reference to Molly can come only from Clive Langham, not from Woodford. And in a Freudian slip in the composition process, Clive has Claude call Sonia 'Molly' in their kitchen fight.

The breakdown in role-playing after that would be completely confusing if Resnais' visuals did not hold the scenes together by their repetition. Helen, supposedly Claude's lover, repeats Molly's words to Woodford. And Woodford play-acts Claude cursing his father, now played (ironically) by Claude. Woodford says to Claude, supposedly about Sonia: 'Did you torture her all those years just to have something to write about?'

Ingeniously, Resnais' repeated scenes function as a kind of revision process, a starting over for Clive Langham. The club scene, in which Sonia introduces Woodford to Claude, who has just tried in court to convict Woodford of murder, is Clive Langham's attempt as a writer/father to find a centre, to go back and begin again. Unfortunately, the decontamination process has already gone too far. Woodford says to Claude: 'What I'm searching for, Mr. Langham, is a moral language.' These were, in fact, Claude's words to his father, who now turns them back on his son in the composition process.

And suddenly the visuals break down as well. Claude and Sonia find themselves on the same patio as Helen and Claude, Helen and Woodford before them. In the background, the waves of the ocean are 'frozen', painted-on, a cardboard replication. As long as Clive Langham has control over the dialogue, the visuals in the scenes of conversation 'conform' to the composition. But his impending death, always expressed visually, destroys first the backdrop, then the foreground, from the frozen waves to the pursuit of Woodford. Woodford as half-werewolf runs through the woods. Only this time it is Claude with a gun in pursuit, not the anonymous soldiers with machine guns. Claude corners him and says

before firing: 'How it must have amused you to torment my mother!' Clive Langham here projects himself into the character of his son, all the while having Woodford play the part of the father.

The transition from this scene to the final scene is an intertextual allusion. Woodford's body is dumped into a bin. The camera moves in for a close-up on his hand. Cut to a close-up of Clive Langham's hand in the final scene, with the sound of cicadas on the soundtrack for the first time and the sun shining for the first time in the entire film. The allusion is, of course, to the cutting by psychic association in *Hiroshima mon Amour*, from the Japanese lover's sleeping hand twitching on the bed in Hiroshima to the dying German lover's hand, twitching on the ground at Nevers. The sound of cicadas is also a reference to *Hiroshima mon Amour*, in which the same sound, the first 'natural' sound in the film, punctuates the first time that we see the lovers' faces, all sound accompanying their memories and reconstructions up to that

fiction, the creator duped by his own creation.

What prevents the film from being a simple 'it-was-all-a-dream' resolution, too facile a conclusion for Resnais' tastes, is that there are real victims in this story. The missing Molly remains missing, whether by actual suicide or accidental death. And Claude remains the estranged son of a prodigal father, no matter whose fault it is. Indeed, in retrospect (meaning that one has to see the film at least a second time, and maybe more, to piece it all together) Claude's is the most crucial role in the film, since his behaviour is the constant reminder of Molly, the mother. We are only given one glimpse of Molly in the film: a photograph. The photograph is of a woman we know in the film as Helen. Clive Langham's failure on both fronts (he was a womaniser in the marriage and he neglected Molly when he wasn't chasing women because he was writing) is photo-clear at the end. The sexual entanglement he has tried to create between Sonia and Woodford or between Claude and Helen never succeeds,



Claude (Dirk Bogarde), 'the estranged son of a prodigal father'

point having been stylised sound: voice-over commentary of a recitative nature or discordant modern music.

The last scene of *Providence* is the 'recuperative' scene, the only real scene. We see that there is, in fact, a strain in the Clive-Claude relationship, but that the strain issues from Clive, not from Claude. We learn that Claude and Sonia are happy together, that Sonia is hardly the frustrated woman and sex-bitch of the rest of the film. She sits at Clive's side (in place of Molly), watching and commenting on Claude. Woodford is hardly a wild man, a werewolf or even a womaniser. He is extremely subdued in the final scene.

The resolution to this meta-film goes something like this: we finally see Clive Langham out in the open, objectified on his birthday and death-day. And, curiously, we as spectators assume the role of final creator. We now know the truth about the children that Clive Langham never knows: that he is loved, has been loved all along, and the only limits to that love are the terms that he himself has dictated. All the 'torture' of the rest of the film is exiled to the level of pure

precisely because incest prevents it from succeeding. Clive Langham's ultimate failure is that he never resolved his wife's death before his own. And he never re-created Molly in the fiction of his composition.

As film, *Providence* ends with the creator within the film becoming a character, a dying character at that. His point of view accedes to our own, and we have information/knowledge about him and the other characters that he will never have. As such, there is a kind of deflation or release of tension in this last scene. We are like the critics who only find out about a writer's life (and his intentional fallacy) after his death. But as meta-film, *Providence* has a very different ending. The intertextual allusions to *Hiroshima mon Amour* do cinematically what Clive Langham's comments about style in the dialogue have done throughout the film: they send us to Resnais, not Clive Langham. Product of a double-bind, the meta-film is a way for the director to go on creating, even while the failed artist dies within the film. Stated that way, *Providence* tells us a great deal about the enigmatic and usually silent Alain Resnais.



Franju's 'Hôtel des Invalides'. A Txukahamei Indian in 'The Tribe that Hides from Man'

ARMS AND THE ABSENT

One way of approaching this question might be to concentrate upon films whose interest seemed to lie entirely in their subject matter, and to examine the artifices by which such 'subject matter' was filmically constructed. This has, indeed, been the emphasis of much recent criticism, which has applied itself to the refutation of the position—rarely argued and scarcely arguable, but none the less potent for that—which treats documentary reality as an unmediated view of the world. But this leads ultimately to an impasse. If documentary reality is a filmic construct, yet is not a verifiable statement and certainly does not wish to be taken for a fiction, what exactly is it? Does it inhabit a purely autistic universe, having circumscribed its means of expression only to find its links with its sources severed regardless? I have preferred to approach the question from the opposite direction: to choose films whose linguistic complexities are extreme and obvious, and to ask whether or not such complexities render meaningless any claim to privileged relationship with the events or objects filmed.

The revolution in documentary filmmaking which was initiated by the introduction of portable equipment in the early 60s may be perceived in two ways: either as having renewed its innocence, by obviating the need for pre-planning of shots, or as having destroyed its innocence, by raising unprecedented doubts about the nature of its images. For this reason, I have selected one film from the earlier and one from the later period: Georges Franju's *Hôtel des Invalides* (1952) and Adrian Cowell's *The Tribe that Hides from Man* (1970). These two films seem

Dai Vaughan

Two attitudes towards documentary are frequently met. One, to be found among film-makers in such fields as anthropology and current affairs, is that documentary is a form to which aesthetic considerations are of little relevance. Truth remains truth regardless of how you tell it. The other, more in sympathy with the critical temper, is that all film involves manipulation of images and that to accord documentary a privileged relationship with reality is therefore nonsensical. Film remains fabrication regardless of what it is saying.

In using the word 'fabrication' I deliberately imply a sort of gradient where the idea of an artefact may be allowed to slide effortlessly into that of a falsehood. But still, it is by no means clear what manner of truth we might grant to statements which, expressed in what is not an abstract symbolic system, do not lend themselves to verification. Most of us would feel that the word 'documentary' had not justified its place in the dictionary if the films so called did not manifest some relationship with reality not shared by others. A documentary makes—implicitly—two claims. On the one hand, to present us with images referring unashamedly to their sources; on the other, to articulate a statement of which those sources will be the object. But can these claims be reconciled?

to me to represent high-points of sophistication in, respectively, the classical and modern phases of documentary: 'classical' in the sense that the status of the linguistic elements—the individual images—is not treated as shifting or problematical; 'modern' in the sense that it is.

□

The Hôtel des Invalides in Paris, which houses Napoleon's tomb, combines the functions of the Chelsea Hospital and the Imperial War Museum. Franju's film concentrates upon the Musée de l'Armée, though the old soldiers make one or two important appearances. The film is shot in a chill, Novemberish light. *Hôtel des Invalides* in high summer is almost unthinkable. Yet this can scarcely mean that such truth as the film entails will fluctuate with the seasons. It is here, straight away, that we encounter the paradox we hope to elucidate: for our primary response is to a mood; yet what has a mood to do with a museum?

The film, which follows the simple plan of a tour around the galleries, is composed and cut with that formal precision which one is inclined to call 'military'. (A characteristic pattern is the strict alternation of diagonal forward tracking shots with static close-ups of items of particular interest.) A few 'other' visitors go the rounds with us; and the commentary, after an initial introduction, is carried by the voices of the guides.

On a superficial view, *Hôtel des Invalides* is a study in the horrors of warfare; and there is no lack of material for such an interpretation. Early on, we see a pair of youngsters laughing at the dumpy shape of an old mortar. There is a star-burst wipe from a close-up of the girl to a newsreel shot of an A-bomb cloud, and the commentator says, 'Some of these engines of war amuse the visitor by their strange appearance; but, when we consider the dangerous growth of an industry which is shooting up like a poisoned mushroom, we must agree that it is no laughing matter.' A double wipe, from the edges to the centre of the screen, takes us to a close shot of a shut door, which then opens to admit us to the museum.

But other interpretations are available: interpretations which mainly support, but sometimes clash with, this primary one. Shortly before the scene just mentioned is the most celebrated moment in the film. Out in the courtyard, the camera pans down from a low-angle shot of a statue of Napoleon on the façade of the building. As the pan ends, a squeaky little wheel enters from the right—a wheelchair in which a nurse is pushing a wounded soldier. Over the pan the commentary says, 'Legend has its heroes. War has its victims.' The nurse pauses, and we have a close-up of the vacant, paralysed face of the old soldier apparently gazing up at the statue. (If we assume that he can see the statue, we read pained inscrutability into his expression; if we assume that he cannot, we read irony into the juxtaposition.) Then the soldier is wheeled out of picture in a shot whose foreground is dominated by the heavy barrel of a gun. Clearly the pan from the statue to the soldier supports the antithesis between hero and victim, between the glory of legend chronicled by the conqueror and the sufferings of those who achieve the conquest. But the visual metaphor in which this antithesis is

couched—the contrast between mineral (whether stone or metal) and human flesh—weaves an independent course through the film. Finally, at a more abstract level of response, we are offered a third antithesis: between petrified past and mortified present.

The opposition between mineral and flesh is picked up almost immediately, with bronze lovers on the lugs of an artillery-piece, and is then pursued in the room devoted to suits of armour. The early examples have the presence and the menace of primitive masks. The gentle tracking past the 'figures' seems not so much to mimic their movement as to draw attention to their lack of it. As the sequence progresses, the metal skins become more realistic: armour with moustaches; armour with noses; totally enclosed armour, very rare; a child's armour suspended from the ceiling like an aborted foetus in a pickling jar. Later, when we come upon the head of the bronze statue of General Mangin, which seems to have been hit in the ear by a cannonball, this obvious symbol of human decapitation is enriched, through the persistence of the mineral/flesh metaphor, with the suggestion that the more closely metal resembles flesh

The statue of Napoleon and the old soldier in a wheelchair



the more vulnerable it becomes. The theme is rounded off at the end of the film, where we cut with a smart 'Eyes right!' from the tomb of Marshal Foch to a line of children leaving the museum, grouped as tightly as the bronze bearers of Foch's bier and singing the trench song *Auprès de ma Blonde*.

To appreciate the pervasive influence of the 'third level' of antithesis—an interdependence between the past as hypostasis and the present as vacancy—we must look at what is perhaps the oddest sequence in the film: where a girl peers into a trench periscope and 'sees' newsreel images of soldiers going over the top. The lead-up to this deserves scrutiny. In the final shot of the previous sequence the white coat of the girl, whom we have not yet seen, is reflected like a passing ghost in the slanting glass of a case of rumpled tunics; and this suggestion of the visitors as revenants has been anticipated in a still earlier shot where their shadows, passing out of frame in the same direction, are cast against a panoramic painting of a battlefield—the last of the group, whom again we have not seen, being a limping man supported on the arm of his companion. Whether the past is haunting the present or the present the past, the two realms seem to exclude each other.

When we cut to the periscope, in long-shot, the girl enters and moves towards it while her boyfriend stations himself immediately behind it with his back to us. On the practical level, this serves to demonstrate that the periscope has nothing up its sleeve—that it is not rigged to project images. On the metaphorical level it frames the boyfriend in the supports of the device in which the girl will watch young men facing death for the honour of France. In midshot the girl swivels the periscope, which its label identifies as coming from the Chemin-des-Dames sector. (The irony of such a name in the context of trench warfare is emphasised by a hint of the tune *Auprès de ma Blonde* on the music track, which anticipates its use at the end of the film.) Next we see a reflection in the periscope mirror of a plaster head of an officer which we may have noticed in the background of a previous shot (and which somewhat resembles General Mangin, whose severed bronze head we have recently been shown). This shot introduces a sense of spatial disorientation; and it may be considered, with its ghostly white reflection juxtaposed against the tangible presence of the girl, the converse of the shot in which her reflected white coat flitted across the display of uniforms. There follows a close-up of the girl's own reflection as she uses the mirror to adjust her hair; then, with a flick of the controls, we are into the newsreel footage. The soundtrack cuts from music to battle effects.

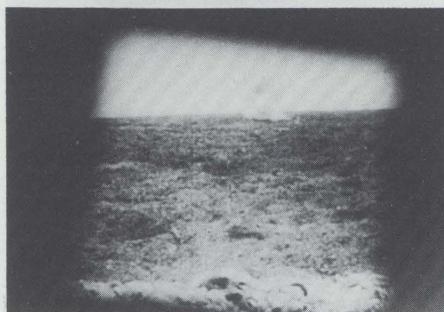
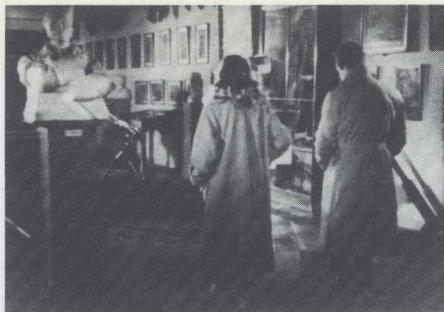
What, however, is the status of this newsreel sequence? Our initial response may well be that it 'doesn't quite work'; but I think this is because we are inclined to seek in it the obvious contrast between the living horror of warfare and the mute witness of the relics. But in which of these two categories are we to perceive the newsreel as falling? The sequence might have supported this 'obvious' interpretation in either of two cases: if the newsreel footage had been cut directly against shots of museum exhibits; or if it had been presented as being seen by the girl in a what-the-butler-saw viewing contraption. In the former event there would have been merit

in using clean, undamaged film, as similar as possible in quality to the surrounding footage, in order to emphasise that contrast was to be drawn merely between the 'content' of the images, i.e. between war and museum. In the latter, where we would have identified our perception with that of the girl, the scratched, sparkly and jump-cut quality of the newsreel (as actually used) would have marked it as itself an exhibit, occupying the same status as all the other exhibits shown, and would therefore not have impeded our response to its images as betokening reality. But where does the sequence stand in relation to these alternatives?

There is indeed, despite the fact that we know the periscope is *not* projecting film, a hint that the newsreel is being somehow 'viewed' in it. The early shots are masked at the edges as if being reflected in the mirrors. Perhaps, then, we should read this as an 'as if' construction: it is *as if* the girl were observing a battle through the periscope at Chemin-des-Dames. But in this case too, surely, we would expect the images to be clean and unscathed, enabling us to assign to the battle the same degree of reality as to the actual surroundings. Alternatively, we may understand that the girl is stimulated by looking into the periscope to *imagine* a battle in the only way she has seen one—in the scratched and grainy idiom of war footage. But in that case why are the initial shots masked exactly as is the actual reflection-shot of the plaster General?

Besides, despite the careful setting-up of the girl's involvement with the periscope, there are equally persuasive reasons for not reading the battle footage as in any sense perceived by the girl. First, although this footage is accompanied by sound effects which would seem to set it on the level of naturalism, these effects are curiously thin. Very similar effects—token sound, almost—have already been used over a shot of a naval aircraft apparently aiming its guns at some people seen distantly in the courtyard; and in that instance the effects are clearly established as part of a disjunctive soundtrack rich in comment and association. Secondly, the only other newsreel section in the film—the shot of the A-bomb—is closely parallel in that it is introduced by the only other close-up of a girl; yet it is firmly didactic in its relation to commentary and firmly artificial in opening and closing with wipes, which are not used elsewhere.

But if we deny the relationship of the newsreel to the girl's perceptions, do we not thereby dispute its relationship to the periscope into which she is looking, and hence make nonsense of the elaborate construction of the sequence? One way out might be to suggest that the damaged battle-film represents the periscope's own memory, stored in the reticulated quicksilver of an ageing mirror. But we are now being driven into using an outlandish metaphor, not as a tentative verbal equivalent for the metaphoric potential of a film image, but to describe the mode in which an interaction of images is to be understood. The fact of the matter, as this must suggest, is that the conventions are methodically contradicting each other and are conspiring to present the newsreel, not as shots of battle, but as shots of *shots* of battle—or, if we like, as the image of something which was once an image of battle, but whose potency has evaporated or may be denied. Neither of the simple conventions—



'Hôtel des Invalides': shots from the periscope sequence described on p. 183

direct juxtaposition or the what-the-butler-saw device—would have demanded this rupture in our cognitive response whereby the truth is held at one remove from our apprehension.

Once identified, this cognitive rift spreads through the film like a molecular realignment in a crystal lattice. Consider, for example, the use of the guides' voices for commentary. The guides are occasionally seen in picture; and their voices are laid over their shadows, their backs and their presumed presence just off-screen. No doubt this method was dictated by

budgetary limitations upon synchronous shooting: but the consequence is to establish the voices as comment both within the film and upon it. If 'This way, ladies and gentlemen,' and 'Here we see such-and-such,' are addressed to us as well as to the visitors, then so is, 'Take your hats off, gentlemen, before the colours.' And what are we to make of the moment, already mentioned, where the picture itself cuts to the command, 'Eyes right!?' By normal convention, if a commentator says, 'He lives in a grey house,' and we cut to a grey house, this is to be read as a direct statement in film language, whereas if a character says, 'I live in a grey house,' and we cut to a grey house, it is to be read as an image of what the character is seeing or visualising. There can, of course, be mutation—even within a single shot—from one mode to the other, as when commentary picks up from voice-over. But in *Hôtel des Invalides* the ambivalence is present from the beginning and is never resolved, so that the epistemic status of the images is always in doubt. Moreover, the guides are themselves old soldiers—in a sense, exhibits.

Once again, then, we find a movement patterned upon the spiralling down from protective metal to the metal representation of unprotected flesh. The ambivalence in the treatment of the newsreel footage opens up a gap through which *Hôtel des Invalides*, since it is itself film footage, may be perpetually repositioned within its own perspectives. Not in the sense that it would demand to be seen as 'shots of shots' (our very need to attribute meaning effects a rapid recuperation on that level), but in the sense that the assimilated photographic images are denied a primary eloquence—or that such eloquence should always drain into its negation. Had the newsreel been intercut for direct contrast with the museum, the armaments might have taken on the quality of having just cooled, as in those paintings of game which are redolent of cordite because the carcasses are obviously fresh. But the gun-barrels stacked upright in the Courtyard of Victory are images not of guns but of things which were once guns—and yet perhaps still are guns (as the spiral turns) to the guide, to the visitors, to us. The tank is both awesome in its blackness and innocuous as old boiler-plate. The stone which is an image of the man who was Napoleon faces the man who is an image of what was once a soldier, yet is still a man. And the metaphor of vulnerability in the head of General Mangin receives an added undertone: that when the armour-become-flesh is split open, there is nothing inside.

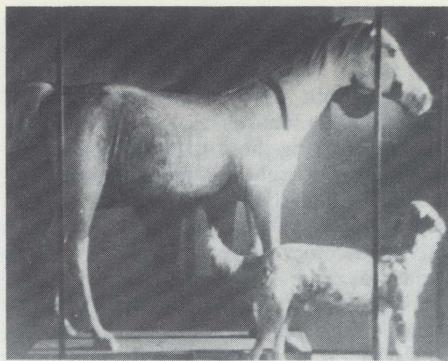
Perhaps the most bizarre object we encounter is the glass case containing, stuffed, Napoleon's horse and dog. As with most works of taxidermy, we are caught in the fascination of an irresolvable paradox which resembles that of the newsreel footage. As we look at the close-up of the horse, with its globular glass eye and its fixed, stitched grin, we try to tell ourselves that Napoleon sat astride this object, patted its neck and gave it lumps of sugar; yet there is less horse in it than in a few swift lines from Hokusai or Gaudier-Brzeska. It is flesh made statue by the passing of years—a horse which is an inadequate image of the horse it once was. Similarly, when the composition of a shot and its overlaid sound seem to tell us that an aircraft is firing at a group in the courtyard, our response is: 'See it as a fighter strafing

those people . . . No, it's no use. I can't.' It is a stuffed aeroplane. Neither of these examples, I think, would assume its full effect without our predisposition to doubt the face value of the film's vocabulary. As it is, they contribute to it. One way or another, intrinsically or by their context, we are repeatedly presented with images which seem to strive for an heroic stature—or even simply to strive for a meaningful symbolic existence—to which they cannot attain. The museum is seen as the locus of something which, for all its obsessive concreteness, remains elusive.

History may remind us that *Hôtel des Invalides* was made at a time when French intellectuals were disillusioned by the failure of the Resistance to sustain its revolutionary impetus into post-war society; and when the military establishment, on the other hand, had probably not recovered from the shock of 1940. But this, while it may help to explain the emergence of such a film at this particular juncture, can scarcely account for our response to it now. Since film speaks not with signs but with images, and since these images draw their primary force from the viewer's own experience, film syntax cannot easily imply a conclusion which is at variance with the value we assign to its elements. What is it in our perception of the subject matter—the contents of an army museum—which enables us to see the syntactical breakdown in the periscope sequence as implying a rift in the epistemic status of the images (rather than just as a maladroit handling of the medium) and, conversely, to see this rift as contributing to this perception?

If we visit a museum of art, we are presented directly with the significances of the exhibits—in the sense that the artists' purpose was to make these objects for our scrutiny. In a museum of science we see gadgets which, though obsolete, have added their contribution to the present corpus of knowledge. The only place where we experience a melancholy comparable with that induced by a show of past military hardware is a museum of the theatre devoted to old posters, playbills, moth-eaten costumes and snapshots autographed by forgotten matinée idols—the paraphernalia of the ephemeral. Here, because the significance to which the objects point is vanished and irretrievable, we can respond only in that mood of sentimentality to which the theatrical profession is understandably prone. But even plays are repeated. Battles are not.

It is from this standpoint that we may interpret the grey light which suffuses *Hôtel des Invalides*. Whereas other seasons might have assumed symbolic significance—spring suggests reconciliation, summer forgetfulness or mid-winter a stoic fortitude—the November light permits no patina of regret, hope or nostalgia. It presents us objects with complete neutrality. But it is precisely neutrality which renders an army meaningless. The 'mood' of *Hôtel des Invalides* lies not just in our response to its grisaille tonal range but in our accepting its contradictory use of film conventions as an articulation of the view that threadbare regimental colours, the insignia of victories rendered null by the shifts and reversals of subsequent history, are the equivalent of raves for productions no-one remembers. If we really believed that its 'victories' were our victories, the film would probably not work for us.



Flesh made statue: Napoleon's horse and dog

The old comrades attend a service at their church of St. Louis, a baroque edifice which has clearly survived the 'decapitation of the monarchy' and where the priest, performing his offices across an acre of chancel, makes the sign of the cross with a gesture verging upon the dismissive. The soldiers, boasting their medals and their mutilations, proudly raise a banner with the motto, 'Le Paradis est à l'Ombre des Sabres'. The sentiment is not only monstrous: it is out of date. As with the symbols of war which are no longer instruments of war, their presence serves only to assert their loss of significance. To present the army museum among leafless trees, against a sunless sky, is to withhold the promise of fresh emotional engagements and to focus attention upon the exhibits simply as the detritus of lapsed passion.



Hôtel des Invalides is a 'classical' documentary in that the status of the images with respect to the objects shown is, with the arguable exception of the newsreel footage, unvarying and is certainly unquestioned. The cognitive gap which we have examined, manifesting itself as 'mood' and requiring for its closure the viewer's commitment to a specific understanding, consists in the refusal of the film's grammar to articulate those symbolisms already latent in the objects—flags, monuments, engines of war—before they were filmed. With *The Tribe that Hides from Man*, however, there is a constant questioning of the images by the grammar in a way which unsettles our assumptions both about the relation of the apparent event to the event filmed and about the relation of the event filmed to the wider context. But to what purpose? The film caused enough stir at the time of its appearance to inspire a Beatles lyric, and is one of few television programmes to have lodged in the public psyche for many years after its transmission. We must surely assume that its vision derived some profound benefit from the deconstructions practised upon its language.

The Tribe that Hides from Man concerns the attempt of Claudio Villas Boas to establish contact with the remote Kreen-Akrore tribe in the Amazon jungle and to introduce them into the Xingu reserve—a sort of buffer zone between the stone age and the 20th century—before they are steamrollered by the inexorabilities of 'progress'. At first glance, it is little more than a current affairs style account of the expedition. The anthropological insights of Villas Boas, though expressed with that unflinching humanity which, in its realism, stands strangely close to arrogance, are scarcely revelatory. His some-

what ornate Portuguese phrasing, translated and delivered in the impeccable English of Michael Flanders, is oddly reminiscent of Jules Verne. But to say this is already to hint at the pattern of prismatic refractions into which the film's meanings seem broken. It is the equivalent of the 'mood' which we sought to explicate in *Hôtel des Invalides*.

If, however, we seek a point of entry to discussion of the film's structure, comparable to that offered by the bronze/flesh polarisation, we need look no further than the very opening. A pair of eyes, in a paint-smeared face, peers implacably at us through a tangle of branches. The focus blurs, and we mix to a slow zoom-in on to Villas Boas, who reclines in a hammock, swinging mechanically, watchful, smoking. 'For three months I have hardly left this hammock. I know I am beginning to look strained and nervous.' The words of his voice-over establish that he experiences himself as being seen. We mix to a shot of the wall of foliage, which is the edge of the jungle, moving up and down as if viewed from the hammock. But the camera does not adjust to compensate for the swing. It is the gaze of a man who is tired of looking.

Here, announced like a motif in three succinct images, is an intimation not only of the film's theme but also of its manner of address and, by implication, of its stance towards reality. Film convention tells us that the first shot is of an unseen watcher—though this must be a staged shot, since someone who is unseen cannot be photographed. The second shot clearly represents what the watcher sees; and this may perhaps be 'genuine' if our viewpoint is that of the Indian. But the emergence of the voice-over tells us that it is Villas Boas whose viewpoint we share. The third shot, confirming this, is taken as 'subjective', since cameramen do not shoot from hammocks without good reason. Thus the opening sequence, though we assume all the shots to have been filmed on location during Villas Boas' vigil, is put together in a fictional manner. We might be inclined to call it reconstruction; but reconstruction of what? An incident which is not known to have occurred can hardly be reconstructed.

Given the fictional treatment of the images, the use of the present tense in the voice-over strikes an almost aggressive note. (In fiction films, if verbal narration is used at all, it is usually set in the past; and we tend to read fictive use of images similarly.) The remainder of the film is told in flashback (for contact with the Kreen-Akrore is never made); but the present tense is none the less retained for the account of the current expedition, the past being reserved for Villas Boas' recollections of earlier experiences. In these instances the use of reconstruction is acknowledged. Yet even here the status of the images is rarely assured. The account of an Indian attack upon an earlier expedition is illustrated by stills; but are they reconstructed stills or true ones? It is as if the film-makers were saying, 'We could lie to you if we wished; but why should we want to? We could lie without you knowing it; so why not trust us?' But there is more to it than this. The constant ambivalence in the status of the images, the introduction into *vérité* footage of elements which lead us to question its authenticity, serves to define our perception of the film's reality—our attribution to it of documentary truth—as entailing the proviso that, on the level of significance at which we are

responding to it, such questions of veracity do not arise.

The 'manner of address' of *The Tribe that Hides from Man* may be inferred from the sequence in which members of the Txukahamei tribe re-enact, for Villas Boas' benefit, a raid on a Kreen-Akrore village. In the opening long shot he sits in the foreground, as if to be entertained by a dramatic spectacle for which the deserted camp beyond will provide the stage. The 'attack' is then filmed from the midst of the action, in the style of a feature film heavily influenced by *vérité* techniques. As the action dies down we see Villas Boas in pensive close-up; and this is intercut with shots of an Indian handling a necklace, captured from a killed Kreen-Akrore, which Villas Boas recalls having once given to a Txukahamei. The natural sounds fade; the voice-over, by association with the close-up, assumes the quality of interior monologue, so that the other images assume the quality of memory. We see a triumphant Txukahamei maltreating a captured Kreen-Akrore child. 'White men can be just as cruel; but they would never let me see.' It is therefore both a mental image and a thing observed. Did it occur before or after the performance we have just witnessed? The examination of the necklace and the brandishing of the child do not register as reconstruction. (The anguish of the child is certainly unfaked.) These scenes appear to form the climax both of the re-enacted battle and of the real one—a confluence of two continuities and of two levels of signification.

Natural sounds return as we mix to overhead shots of the jungle. Villas Boas and some companions are trying to locate the Kreen-Akrore village from the air with the help of information given by the Txukahamei. As we sight the village there is a quick zoom in, and the frame freezes upon the indistinct image of an Indian looking up at us. The dialogue in the aircraft, subtitled in English, gives way to voice-over: 'What right have we to trouble these tiny dots below? They don't want us... But the world has found them; and we already know the price of their discovery.' From the frozen frames of the 'tiny dots below' we cut to a montage of headlines announcing massacres of the Indians. These, with their murky photographs, are the way our culture presents to us our 'discovery' of the Indian, just as is the frozen image of the film we are looking at. The montage is accompanied by insistent drumming indistinguishable from that cynical parody of tribal music with which the entertainment industry of our society splices its reinterpretations of our acts of slaughter. Our response to this music engages us in an attitude both accusatory and confessional.

The Tribe that Hides from Man addresses us in the equivalent of a colourful colloquial lingo mingling technical jargon with biblical allusion, rhetoric with slang, where each usage sets the others in metaphorical quotes—a sort of cinematic Bloomspiel in which the conventions constantly call each other into question. A way in which our responses may engage with such address can be illustrated with the hunting sequence. The voice-track is telling us that the Indian regards death, whether of animals or of Indians outside his tribe, with indifference. Within the group there is gentleness and love; but outside there is only the jungle. The low-angle shot of a

bowman is in the classic tradition—the presentation of an event as archetypal. But the monkey which falls from the tree, pin-cushioned with arrows, suffers an individual death. There is some chasing of a tapir, taken in harmless long-shot; then we come to a close shot of a frightened monkey which will be killed with clubs. A group of Indians surround the animal, flailing at it. As the activity becomes more violent, the camera begins to zoom in and out quickly whilst panning up and down with the clubs—an orgiastic involvement on the part of the film itself which is at variance with the sentiments of the narration—and this leads into a wholly subjective shot, from the monkey's point of view, of the silhouetted Indians raining blows upon us. It is, of course, a fate which could befall Villas Boas himself were he to put a foot wrong in his dealings with an unknown tribe.

The treatment of this climax is familiar to us from the world of feature films (there is, for example, something very similar to it in Joseph Losey's *The Damned*); and it is the final subjective shot, above all, which those who disapprove of *The Tribe that Hides from Man* quote as undermining its credibility. It seems to me that we may distinguish a number of levels of response, involving successive degrees of reflective abstraction, on which this sequence may be perceived as saying different things or as working (or not working) in different ways:

(1) At an extreme of innocence, of unfamiliarity with feature film conventions as they have grown up over the past eighty years, we might expect incomprehension. Why are the Indians attacking the cameraman? (In the context of a *vérité* documentary this would be a perfectly legitimate question.)

(2) The conventions may be accepted at their face value, as 'saying' that the Indians are vicious people who beat helpless monkeys to death, though the commentary is attempting to excuse them. (This seems to have been the response of most of the press critics, who applied to the film such terms as 'An orgy of nudity and violence').

(3) We may react against the implications of this response—while supposing it to have been the intended one—by rejecting the conventions themselves as 'artificial'.

(4) Alternatively, the artifice may be understood as *purely conventional*, as an item of received film syntax, a device worn so thin as to be virtually transparent, the equivalent of a dead metaphor: just a way of saying, 'Then they killed a monkey.'

(5) The conventions may, however, be seen as called into question by their juxtaposition with those drawn from other traditions—classical documentary, *vérité*, reportage—much as dead metaphors may be brought to life by being mixed. On this level, the feature conventions may be understood as counterposing our European cultural tradition of violence against the attitudes attributed to the Indian.

(6) This may be perceived as the 'purpose' of the sequence; but the method used may be deemed inappropriate on the grounds that to contrast the Indians' *act* of 'violence' with the European manner of *portraying* violence is an untrue antithesis; and that the European tradition would be more accurately represented by the realities of large-scale war than by the way a beating-up may be

sensationalised for the purpose of drama.

(7) Despite this, we may be impressed by the fact that our mistrust of the sequence presupposes our comprehension of it; and, further, that mistrust on one level seems a prerequisite of comprehension on another. Our comprehension may therefore be seen as embodying, in the flaw of its required mistrust, a confession that our response to the Indians' behaviour must inevitably be marred by ethnocentrism, an ethnocentrism which a more direct technique would have concealed behind the camera.

Our awareness of this scale of possibilities does not in itself determine the level on which we will receive the sequence, which is likely to be the one which offers the most fruitful interactions with the remainder of the film. Neither does it enable us to infer the construction placed upon it by the filmmakers. But we may note with some interest that those of our responses which have relied upon the imputing of purpose or intention to the sequence have been, by and large, those which have viewed it with disfavour.

The comparison with *The Damned* might appear fanciful were it not for the fact that such fleeting references, too tenuous to be called quotations, seem frequently to hover over the surface of *The Tribe that Hides from Man*. A purely *vérité* sequence offers us, in the excited discovery of a footprint at the water's edge, a moment straight out of *Robinson Crusoe*—itself one of our earliest myths, telling in its popularity, of encounter between the races. The tapir hunt may recall the portrayal of our primitive ancestors in *2001*. And the meditation from the aircraft upon the 'tiny dots below' cannot fail to suggest a parallel with Orson Welles' speech from the ferris wheel in *The Third Man*: 'Would you feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving—for ever?' Such references mark the complicity of our representations with the totality of our heritage. The humanism of Villas Boas has, as he recognises, one thing in common with the cynicism of Harry Lime: that it presupposes a position of superiority which we, in our understanding of his story, are doomed to share. The collage of styles with its kaleidoscopic internal reflections of our ambient culture, the hermeticism of a work which imprisons rather than excluding us, is appropriate to the account of a man poised between a society too complex for individual comprehension and one which, in its simplicity, eludes even our speculations.

The story ends where it began. The small circle of the present tense is closed; and, with it, the wider orbits of recollection. So far as the film is concerned, Villas Boas will swing in his hammock till the end of time. It is here that we may seek an explanation for the opening shot. We have caught only brief glimpses of the Kreen-Akrore, seen distantly across the water or from the air—just as, in the best horror movies, we are allowed only a glimpse of the monster. When a human form vanished into the jungle during the long march to the river, our uncertainty as to whether this shot is genuine, or merely a simulation of something which one of the party thought he had seen, enhanced our sense of the Kreen-Akrore as absent—as evading not just our overtures but even our modes of representing reality to ourselves. A close-up of a friendly Indian peering at the camera through some leaves, used in a

sequence whose artifice was to state a self-contradiction, can only have been an image of the absence of what it purported to be.

But if Villas Boas will never leave his hammock, the Kreen-Akrore will never be contacted—will never emerge, into face-to-face human ordinariness, from the realm of myth which they share with trolls, elves and goblins. Villas Boas, marvelling that they do not make the staple bread of the Amerindian, that they kill even the children of their enemies, refers to them as alone in the emptiness of their jungle. This is strange anthropology. The villages are communities, and the jungle is their larder. The Indians are not exiles from anywhere. They are at home. The film's resemblance to the work of Jules Verne goes beyond the flavour of its translations to the memory of a time when 19th century science, concealing its diffidence in bravado, faced the atavistic symbol, phantasm yet fact, of the 'dark continents'. It is not a question of racialism; though racialism has bent such imagery to its purposes. It is a reflection of the desire that there should still be a reality outside the grasp of our comprehending languages. By presenting the tribe as absent, the film is able to recapture a Victorian amazement at the world without contravening those 20th century conventions whose insidious message is that life will always be unsurprising. The 'absence' of the Kreen-Akrore is the absence of something whose presence would irrevocably dissolve it as scrutiny dissolves dreams. Our response to *The Tribe that Hides from Man* expresses our longing that a thing may be familiar without losing its magic, that our next triumph may confute our expectations

by not proving a disappointment, that beyond the next peak may stretch, not a vista of more mountains, but the plains of heaven on earth. This, after all, lies within the sphere of documentary.

□

Whereas the maker of a documentary film is likely to see the status of its constituent images—their 'reality'—as an elemental contribution to the meaning of the whole, the viewer is more likely to see things from the opposite direction, attributing to the whole a relevance—a quality of being 'about' something—which he will then read back into the constituent images. In documentary, as perhaps in film generally, meaning precedes syntax. Film has no 'parts of speech'; and only in granting it significance do we freeze its association into a presumptive grammar. (It is perhaps for this reason that we tend, mistakenly, to experience documentary reality as unmediated.) Thus, as has been implied, anyone unwilling to assent to the proposition that glory is military schmaltz may dispute that the bronze/flesh opposition plays a significant part in the structure of *Hôtel des Invalides*; and anyone unresponsive to the elegiac undertones of *The Tribe that Hides from Man* may find its linguistic acrobatics merely tiresome.

It seems to me evident from discussion of the above two films that the complex manipulations to which their images are submitted, far from contradicting, cannot be divorced from the claim of these images to a privileged relationship with the world. If the *Hôtel des Invalides* were a purely fictitious

museum, a montage of architectural details and studio interiors assembled solely for the purposes of the film, then the complex means by which its elements are articulated—the 'cognitive rift' by which its prior symbolic values are denied potency—would crumble into the gratuitous. Its functioning as a general statement is conditional upon confidence in its elements as having an existence anterior to that statement. Likewise the self-questioning narrative of *The Tribe that Hides from Man* could not serve to chronicle a fictitious quest for a fictitious people. Let us not be misled by similarities with devices sometimes employed to deconstruct the false coherences of Realism. It is not simply that to posit the non-existent as absent would be a fatuous exercise, but that the close-up of an Indian may affirm his absence only where the provenance of an image is assumed to be relevant. The Indian is 'absent' precisely because the syntax of fiction, with its assumption of narrative omnipotence (which is what omniscience amounts to in film), is being used to articulate material where such an assumption is precluded. The Indian cannot be 'there' as a documented Kreen-Akrore, since the film narrative (even without the words) asserts that he has not been seen by 'us'; yet he cannot be 'there' as a purely narrative construct, since we are committed to a documentary reading. There is no filmic space for him. What is called in question throughout *The Tribe that Hides from Man* is the relationship of its constituent images to anterior events, whether on the narrowly technical or the broadly cultural level. But this makes no sense unless we assume that the relationship matters.

'The Tribe that Hides from Man'



Japanese Cameraman: Kazuo Miyagawa



Kazuo Miyagawa (left) with Ozu, 1959

Max Tessier and Ian Buruma

On the island of Sado, in the northwest of Japan, a film crew under the direction of Masahiro Shinoda is working on the set of an ancient temple. Behind the camera is an elderly man, very attentive and soft-spoken. He is preparing a long shot of an old gate where two actors (Yoshio Harada and Shima Iwashita, Shinoda's wife) will shelter from the heavy rain—a shot that reminds everyone of the famous *Rashomon* gate. Shinoda's film, *Hanare Goze Orin* (*Banished Orin*), is the 126th that the cameraman has worked on, and he has more than fifty years of filming behind him.

His name is Kazuo Miyagawa (which means 'River of the Shrine') and he is in fact the most famous cameraman in Japan and possibly one of the very best in the world. Few foreigners know his name, though they may have admired his camerawork in Japanese masterpieces by Mizoguchi, Kurosawa, Ichikawa and on one occasion Ozu (*Floating Weeds*), either in stunning black and white (*Rashomon*, *Ugetsu*) or in colour (the exteriors in *Gate of Hell*, *Tokyo Olympics*), in standard frame (late films by Mizoguchi) or in CinemaScope (Ichikawa's films). Obviously, he is responsible for the visual fascination of numerous films made at Daiei that would otherwise be mediocre. Later, I have the opportunity to meet him

again in Kyoto, his native city, where he still lives and to talk about his career. This interview took place some time ago; Kazuo Miyagawa, it has recently been reported, is now getting ready to shoot a new film for Kurosawa.—M.T.

After fifty years in film-making, can you still remember how you started? Was there any particular event that led to you becoming a cameraman?

MIYAGAWA: I can remember that when I was very young, about 12, I had a teacher who taught me the technique of Sumi-E [Japanese Indian ink drawing], and it is certainly from that starting point that I developed 'monochrome' photography, both in black and white and colour. Then there was a shop where children's clothes were sold, and the shop people asked me to do some sketches of the clothes. I met a lot of children, whom I liked very much, but there were so many that I thought it would be easier to photograph them in the clothes. So I asked my father to buy me a camera and took snaps of these clothes, which I developed at home.

Then a friend of mine, the wife of the director Tomotaka Tasaka, who was then working at the Nikkatsu studio, asked me to take photographs for them, to save the

expense of hiring a professional photographer. I joined their baseball club at the same time (it was already a very popular game in Japan) and they told me that I had better work for the Nikkatsu laboratory. At that time (around 1925–30), film people had a very bad reputation and my parents strongly resisted my ambitions to become a cameraman or to involve myself with the film business. So without letting them know, I joined the Nikkatsu film laboratory and I worked there for about three years. All the film companies then had their own processing laboratories. People usually had to work for at least three years before becoming an assistant cameraman and then had to take a physical fitness test before being accepted.

In those days I worked with such directors as Marune and Ozaki, who were making comedies with actors like Ichiro Takasagi or Nosuke Tobayō, who are now completely forgotten. In fact, I was not at all impressed with those actors! I remained an assistant for about thirteen years before becoming a cameraman in my own right. I worked on a great number of comedies. These were the 'slapstick' type, based on the American model, and much less 'elegant' than those Ozu, for instance, was making at that time. Even when I became a fully fledged cameraman I went on shooting nothing but comedies, many of them under the direction of Hiroshi Inagaki, so that they started to call me 'the comic cameraman'. It was then that I learned a lot of technical devices, because we had to invent all kinds of tricks so that each film would seem funnier than the last. I also went to see a lot of movies, both foreign and Japanese. I still do that.

In the 30s and 40s I admired the work of several American cameramen, Lee Garmes and Gregg Toland and William Daniels, and saw a good deal of their work. Once, I thought that Gregg Toland was the best, but later I admired James Wong Howe even more—maybe because he had a very 'oriental touch'. His style was closer to the Japanese way, and I liked him better than Gregg Toland. After the war, when we were able to see new American movies, the Japanese preferred a sharp style of photography, the kind that Lee Garmes or Gregg Toland used. For my own part, I tried to make my camerawork fit the style of the particular director: soft focus for the softness of Inagaki's films, quite sharp for Kurosawa, whose style was the precise opposite, and soft again for Mizoguchi, whom I found quite 'sentimental'. I always tried to master all those different styles, which was not always easy.

Who was the easiest director to work with?

Nobody: they were all very demanding. I never had it really easy!

It seems that *Rashomon* was a very important experience in your career, just as it was in the history of Japanese cinema.

Of course, that was an altogether new experience in photography. At that time, I used to shoot in a rather soft key at the Daiei Company, but for *Rashomon* Kurosawa wanted to have lots of 'special effects', notably in the scenes where Takashi Shimura walks in the forest and in the 'love scene' between Machiko Kyo and Toshiro Mifune. He wanted Mifune to be like a big sun, like the Hinomaru [the red sun of the Japanese flag] in high contrast with the softness of

Machiko Kyo. As it required that contrast between black and white, not the usual grey tone, I even used mirrors against the sun to get that effect, which was something I had never done before. That was very difficult, and it was a great shock to me. But when Kurosawa saw the rushes of the first location (the gate), he was very pleased with the result and told me to go on in the same way. Of course it was a great deal easier when we were shooting in the studio, but even on the locations we more or less succeeded. And then of course, after the success of *Rashomon*, other directors asked me to use the same kind of technique for their own films, though I sometimes thought it wasn't particularly appropriate.

You have a reputation for using unusually long tracking shots, as in *Rashomon*. Was that Kurosawa's idea, or did you make suggestions of your own about that?

As a matter of fact, I learned most of the tracking shot technique with Inagaki in his pre-war films and from Seiichi Tanimoto, the cameraman to whom I was assistant. Inagaki used to put up some rather short rails, but would shoot for a very long time. Kurosawa likes to surround people with his cameras. On the first location, I suggested to him that we shoot the actors as if they were riding on waves, and he liked that! Then he started to be interested in moving the camera in different ways, which he had hardly experienced before—like making some changes in the angle of the camera on the rails. In the latest plan I saw by Kurosawa, I noticed that there were four lines of different colours, and I asked him what that meant. He said that they represented the tracking shots of four different cameras, and it would be wonderful to use them to obtain unprecedented effects on the screen. Unfortunately, it remained nothing more than a plan...

What was the main difference between Kurosawa and Mizoguchi's methods of work? What did Mizoguchi specifically ask from your skill?

The main difference, as I saw it, was that Mizoguchi started building a mood, an

Mizoguchi and Miyagawa shooting 'Street of Shame' (1956)



atmosphere, and then placed his actors and scenes inside that mood, whereas Kurosawa started with the actors themselves and then created the mood from their playing and interconnections. Mizoguchi's pictures were very much influenced by the Sumi-E, I believe, and we often had to wait for a very long time since he had the background of the scene painted in more or less dark grey—to give it more of that 'ink feeling'. He often wanted to have trees or boats, or whatever, painted on the background, to emphasise the mood: if there was a forest with an actor he had the trees painted in black, that was his way of creating the mood. The reason why most scenes were in very deep focus was that Mizoguchi did not like shots to be out of focus at all, even very slightly, even in the background—he wanted everything as neat as possible. That is why he had the characters in the background either very clearly shown or completely dark, almost invisible, since he hated those intermediate, 'out of focus' effects.

How did you manage the famous bathing scene in *Ugetsu*, linked with the extremely bright shot of the 'picnic' on the shore of Lake Biwa?

Oh, yes. That was the only time Mizoguchi ever praised me for my work, as he usually said nothing at all or was critical. Actually, that shot was made entirely by the camerawork. The camera rises from the bathing pool and follows the stream, then there is a quick dissolve on the sand of Lake Biwa—it was a dissolve of about twelve *shaku*.* I was quite angry when I saw *Ugetsu* recently on television, and this delicate linking passage between the bathing scene and the picnic was missing from the print; I found that very sad.

I never found Mizoguchi a particularly difficult person to work with, though that is part of the legend, often built up by people who didn't really know him. Some of his collaborators, like Yoda (the scriptwriter) and Mizutani (the set-decorator), have said that he was very hard but I never experienced that myself, though he was indeed short of compliments. Of course, he would go to the museum to investigate the accuracy of the props—but that is how I understood his 'strictness'. On *Shin Heike Monogatari* (1955), we used a number of historical advisers, and Mizoguchi was very satisfied with the reproduction.

What about your work in colour? What did you think of early experiments in that field, such as *Gate of Hell*?

For *Gate of Hell* I only worked on the outdoor location scenes, and Kohai Sugiyama was on the set at the Daiei studio. In fact, *Shin Heike Monogatari* was my first real experience with colour, and the results were not too bad. At the beginning I was very interested in colour photography because it was all new and exciting, but now I think black and white is more interesting because most people don't really use colour in an imaginative way. I remember that I made some experiments in films of the late 50s, such as Yoshimura's *Night River* or *Night Butterflies* or Ichikawa's *Her Brother*. Colour would be much more interesting and rewarding if it was used as part of the content of the movies rather than for its 'prettiness', as it is

most of the time. Fuji colour was not very good when it was first used [in *Carmen Comes Home*, made by Kinoshita in 1951] though it has improved greatly since that period. But I still prefer Eastman colour, which was used for *Gate of Hell* and many other Daiei films.

It is only in Japan that there is a distinction between 'director of photography' on a film and 'lighting cameraman'. Why is that? Is the cooperation always easy?

As a cameraman, I am always interested by the problems of the camera-angle, the composition of the shot, and much less interested in the lighting problems. The picture I have in mind is most important to me. I used to leave it to my assistants to do some camerawork by themselves, but I was never really satisfied so now I always do it myself. As for the lighting cameramen, I have never had any really serious problem with them: as you said, it's a distinct job, and we would never interfere in each other's work.

What was Ichikawa's general conception in pictures you worked on with him, such as *Enjo (Conflagration)* and *Kagi (The Key, or Odd Obsession)*?

I found it rather difficult to work with Ichikawa, because his directions for photography were generally rather vague and he was much more interested in acting and the direction of actors. Whereas other directors don't much like cameramen to interfere in the making of the film, Ichikawa was very easy about that and let me follow up as many suggestions as I wanted. In the frame, he would use fragmentation of the screen much more than other directors. He thought that the camera should be more 'involved' in the film, almost like an actor. So, quite often, half the frame was filled by a *shoji* [paper window], or even sheer darkness... I wonder what the public thought about it.

Do you think that your own work was sometimes more important for the film than the director's?

Only when the camerawork is more important than the set itself or the actor, as in the burning of the Golden Pavilion in *Conflagration*. In that case my work was indeed more important, because all Ichikawa had to do was say 'I want this!', and the cameraman had to shoot that burning very efficiently, with an extremely detailed preparation.

You shot your first CinemaScope pictures with Ichikawa. Ozu rejected CinemaScope, but do you think that Mizoguchi would have used it if he had not died in 1956, just when CinemaScope started in Japan?

Depending on the content, you can always manage some interesting things with CinemaScope, like 'playing around' with standard shots and CinemaScope shots. I found it full of possibilities, if one was able to master it, and I remember coming back from a trip to Hollywood and talking to Mizoguchi about the wonders of the VistaVision camera and of CinemaScope. He seemed very interested in that because he was already considering the size of the frame used as a cinematographic *Emakimono* [Japanese picture scroll]. Had he lived longer, I am quite sure that his next film, which was to have been *Osaka Monogatari*, would have been shot in CinemaScope. Unlike Ozu, Mizoguchi was really open to new techniques. ■

**Shaku*: ancient measure of distance in Japan.

To the Distant Observer

James Leahy



Oshima's 'The Ceremony'

Noël Burch is a writer and film-maker who, though based in Paris since 1951, has during the course of this decade come to exert an increasing influence on some branches of film-making and theory in the English-speaking world, despite the fact that there has often been a considerable lag between his production of a text and its appearance in English. *Theory of Film Practice* was published by Secker and Warburg some six years after it had been written as a series of articles for *Cahiers du Cinéma*; four years after these articles had been published by Gallimard as *Praxis du Cinéma*; six years after Jean-Luc Godard had, in an interview in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, praised the account of the articulations of montage ('raccords') this work contains as: 'strictly practical. You have a feeling they're the view of a man who's done it himself, who's thought about what is involved in doing it—a man who has come to certain conclusions on the basis of his physical handling of film.' *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema**, though it has undergone considerable editing and some rewriting under the guidance of Annette Michelson, had virtually been completed by the end of March 1975. Indeed, material from this manuscript was used by Jonathan Rosenbaum in his article on Donald Richie's *Ozu: His Life and Work* for SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1975, and an extract reproduced in *Yasujiro Ozu*, the critical anthology edited by John Gillett and David Wilson which appeared at the time

of the two-part retrospective of Ozu's work at the National Film Theatre early in 1976.

This phenomenon of lag is of more than academic interest. Despite the boom in film books of some years back, there remains a reluctance on the part of publishers to commit themselves to works based upon a close analysis of filmic form and style rather than theme, and to works which question (on historical or theoretical grounds, or both) the assumptions underlying most of contemporary film criticism and history. Further, no writer wishes continually to reiterate what he has argued elsewhere, and in *To the Distant Observer* Burch often refers the reader to his development of an analysis in which the theoretical implications of a particular formal strategy are elaborated; for example, to *Theory of Film Practice* (which has appeared) when discussing editing (p. 22), the formalisation of the soundtrack (p. 246), and elsewhere; to his articles on Dreyer and Lang for *A Dictionary of the Cinema*, edited by Richard Roud (which has not yet appeared) when discussing the 'notion of the "roles" of the camera' (p. 316), the camera's 'physical presence' as revealing of an 'authorial presence' (p. 223), aspects of the use of the long take (p. 225), and elsewhere. Similarly, one regrets the non-availability of what seem to be important Japanese texts: for example Sato Tadao's *Ozu Yasujiro no gei-jitsu*, an unpublished English translation of which does apparently exist.

The delayed publication or non-availability in English of Burch's work, and of work from other schools or generations (for example,

much of the work of Mitry; of Deslandes and Richard) is an index of the paucity of film scholarship and theory available to filmmakers and students who do not read French, and of the traditional separation in the English-speaking world of the activities of film-maker, critic, historian and theorist. Moreover, this lag, together with Burch's generosity in making his manuscripts available to students, teachers, writers, seems sometimes to have led to the wrenching of certain of his arguments and analyses from their context, and their presentation as strawmen for the arguments of some other theoretical position.

For example, one assumes Stephen Heath had Burch in mind when he wrote (*Screen*, Autumn 1976): 'Japanese films are often used as a contrasting frame of reference in the formal deconstruction arguments'; yet Burch's concern with Japanese cinema goes far beyond a mere attempt to accumulate evidence to bolster the notion of the deconstruction of the filmic codes which informed his article with Jorge Dana in *Afterimage* No. 5. Indeed, Burch's concern with Japanese modes of narrative articulation is often remarkably close to Heath's. 'The problematical nature of Oshima's work arises from the question: what is the relation between this *me* and the struggles *out there*?' (Burch, p. 327, emphasis in the original); 'something remains over, however, something that Oshima's films constantly attempt to articulate as a new content (in Marx's sense of a content that goes beyond) in the exploration of the political relations of the subject and the subjective relations of the political' (Heath). '*The Hanging* exemplifies the contradiction central to Oshima's work. It instantiates the encounter of the principle of Marxist analysis which views class struggle as the motor of history with the ideology of the individual or subject which is consubstantial with the bourgeois myth of self-fulfilment and whose libertarian version is the ideal of self-liberation' (Burch, pp. 338–9).

Drawing on another crucial text not available in English, the title of which he translates as 'The situation of the post-war Japanese cinema with regard to the status of the subject', helps Burch to locate the films of its author, Oshima, as articulating 'an analytical and critical approach to the history of film language, not unrelated indeed to that of Godard.' However, as Burch points out, an examination of the chronology of Oshima's career makes it clear that what is at issue here is not the influence of Godard on Oshima, but of parallel concerns and interests producing parallel results. Indeed, *Night and Fog in Japan* (1960) is a work of far more radical experimentation, successfully achieved, than anything Godard attempted until much later in the decade. Interestingly, the spatial organisation of the film, as a setting for the articulation of its dramatic concerns and narrative flashback structure, is almost precisely that which Nick Ray proposed for *The James Brothers (The True Story of Jesse James)* in 1956, but was not able to realise in Hollywood, and rather similar to how he conceived handling the film he was unable to finance independently about the Chicago Conspiracy Trial (1969–71). The latter film would have had a radical political content and debate comparable, in the American context, to the Oshima, and have substituted split-screen multiple image projections for

*Scolar Press, £10.00 (hardback), £4.95 (paperback).

flashback narrative structures.

It is central to Burch's thesis that: 'Inherited primarily from Brecht and Eisenstein—and/or from a reading of traditional Japanese art in the light of their teachings—is the concern of Oshima and his fellows in so many of their films that representation should acknowledge its production, that picture, sound, editing, should have their own specific articulation—a view expressly formulated by Oshima in his 1963 article.' Further, that: 'With *The Hanging* (*Kosheiki*, 1968), we have perhaps the first Japanese film which makes explicit the affinities between the national cinema's chief historical tendencies and a Marxist concept of a reflexively critical representation, first given theoretical form by Brecht and now, in the West and in Japan, central to the issue of the relationship of the performing arts to the class struggle.'

It is in an attempt to analyse 'the national cinema's chief historical tendencies' that Burch devotes more than two-thirds of his text to the period 1917–45, arguing that 'Japan's singular history, informed by a unique combination of forces and circumstances, has produced a cinema which is in essence unlike that of any other nation.' As well as drawing extensively on detailed analyses of films (perhaps most importantly *Woman of Tokyo*, *A Story of Floating Weeds*, *An Inn in Tokyo*, *Only Son*, *Toda Brother and Sister* and *There Was a Father* by Ozu; *O-Sen of the Paper Cranes*, *Sisters of Gion*, *Tale of Late Chrysanthemums*, *A Tale of Loyal Retainers of the Genroku Era*, by Mizoguchi; *A Star Athlete* by Shimizu; *Fallen Blossoms* by Ishida; *Wife, be like a Rose* by Naruse; *Page of Madness* by Kinugasa; *Souls on the Road* by Murata and Osanai), Burch marshals evidence from a range of scholars relating to the history and organisation of Japanese society, to Japanese architecture, and to the practice of traditional Japanese arts (painting, poetry, the various narrative arts and the theatrical forms: no, kabuki, doll theatre).

He cites the poem 'On seeing the Body of a Man Lying among the Stones on the Island of Samine in Sanaku Province' (c. 680–700) as an example of both polysemy (roughly Empson's concept of ambiguity in poetry) and of 'an approach to narrative which is a constant of Japanese literature and which was to reach its final and by no means least significant avatar in the cinema of the 1930s.' He quotes Brower and Miner's commentary on this text: 'Primarily what interests . . . is not so much the actors as the actions' (*Japanese Court Poetry*), and suggests, 'The language process is constantly at work on the very surface of these poems.' Further: 'Narrative as such is not foreign to Japanese tradition; it is, on the contrary, omnipresent, but its modes are radically different from ours. As we have already seen, in kabuki and the doll theatre, the primary narrative dimension is isolated, set apart from the rest of the theatrical substance, designated as one function among others. In the West, on the other hand, since the eighteenth century, our major narrative arts—the novel, the theatre and more recently the cinema—have tended towards a kind of narrative saturation; every element is aimed at conveying, at expressing, a narrative essence.' Thus, the *benshi* (commentator) in the silent cinema takes on a role which has traditional antecedents;

moreover, his activities mean that: 'the image was purged of speech and relieved to an almost equal degree of narrative burden.'

Further, the process of the production of filmic meaning is constantly at work on the very surface of a whole range of Japanese films, not only in the masterworks of Ozu and Mizoguchi, whose attitude to the filmic articulations of space, time, narrative by means of camera position, camera movement or lack of it, editorial decision and set design represent 'a supreme refinement and systematisation of those traits which are most specifically Japanese', but also, Burch argues, in such thoroughly popular works as those of the *chambera* genre (roughly equivalent to the swashbuckler). He takes Matsuda's *The Red Bat* as typical, whilst describing the unfortunate lack of appropriate examples available to him, proposes that its handling of the dissolve, cut and swish-pan offers 'a challenge to the very notion of the code' comparable to, if far less coherent than, that offered by Dreyer's *Vampyr*, and suggests: '*What was a mass cultural attitude in Japan was a deeply subversive vanguard practice in the Occident*' (emphasis in original).

Films like *The Red Bat* are indeed part of popular culture, but in a sense inapplicable perhaps in the West, since they derived their partly presentational approach from conceptions shared by an entire society for centuries. In the West, it was a dominant class which, in the course of its struggle to subdue a rising class, imposed upon that class (and ultimately upon most of society) a synoptic vision of what were uniquely its own modes of representation. Most important of all, these were watered down to an impoverished functionalism in support of archetypal fantasies and ideologically weighted illusionism.' This is the central political and aesthetic thesis of his book, and the lesson it is proposed that 'the distant observer', the Western scholar, aesthetician, historian, critic and film-maker, should draw from this 'detour through the East', that: 'no Japanese artistic practice, from the earliest known poetry . . . up through the theatre and literature of the Edo (i.e. the Tokugawa) period ever subscribed to . . .' the notion that the 'process of the production of meaning' should be masked as Burch suggests it has been in Western art and thought since the eighteenth century and the rise of the bourgeoisie.

It is this thesis that is the foundation of his challenging and revealing if possibly overschematic account of the emergence of the Western codes of filmic representation from the presentational forms of the primitive cinema (Chapter 5), and of the most controversial critical judgment of his work: that the truly important Japanese directors of the post-war era are Kurosawa and Oshima, to whom he devotes long and important chapters, and not Ozu and Mizoguchi, whose major achievements were attained in the 30s and early 40s.

Mizoguchi was throughout his career a master of dramatic narrative in a sense that Ozu was not. And judged according to the stylistic criteria of dominant criticism, *The Life of a Woman* by Saikaku or *Sansho the Bailiff* . . . are no doubt in all respects the equal of *Sisters of Gion* or *Tale of Late Chrysanthemums*. But from our historically and theoretically oriented standpoint the importance of these early films is incom-

parably greater; their superior internal rigour is due in large part to the director's fidelity to the otherness of his native culture—just as his ultimate decline must be understood within the context of Japan's historical situation and that of her cinema after the 1945 defeat.'

While there is no doubt that Burch's analyses of the specific films by Ozu, Mizoguchi and others referred to above (too long and detailed even to summarise here) effectively demonstrate the radical difference between these films and their directors' post-war work, it still seems to me that he underestimates the effects of the residual traces of a 'Japanese systemics' in a film such as, say, *Tokyo Story* (which he does not once mention). The Japanese cultural text is so radically different that Ozu's late films were able to open the awareness of this writer at least to the possible existence of a specifically Japanese mode of filmic representation. Similarly, Burch himself has analysed Mizoguchi's work on the soundtrack in *A Story by Chikamatsu* (*Theory of Film Practice*, p. 44 ff.) but ignores comparable gestures to the Japanese attitude to representation in relation to the presentation of the illusion of three-dimensional depth on the two-dimensional surface of the cinema screen in *Princess Yang*.

Inevitably, in a work as wide-ranging and ambitious as this book, there are omissions and weaknesses. In the light of Burch's analyses of what are presented, in relation to the major works, as a variety of authorial systemics, one would welcome an explicit account of Burch's theoretical engagement with the notion of authorship. Similarly, one would welcome more documentation of the relationship of the Japanese audience to the dramatic and filmic forms. Finally, for a sympathetic sceptic such as this writer, the Marxist theoretical scheme seems to fit the material slightly too completely, neatly, comfortably. Nevertheless, this is a challenging book of major importance. One hopes that the National Film Theatre, which has done so much good in the service of Japanese film in this country since its pioneering season in 1957, will be able to greet its appearance with a season devoted to its themes, one which is likely to introduce a range of important new works to viewers of quite other political and aesthetic persuasions than those of Burch.

On the whole, the book is beautifully presented. One regrets, however, that the sequences of frame enlargements from certain 30s films do not offer better definition. The layout is exemplary, particularly in relation to the footnoting, and the indexing seems effective, though one would have welcomed a third, 'topic' index. There is a valuable introductory section on technical and theoretical terms; also important checklists of the holdings of various Japanese film archives and libraries. There are very occasional misprints: most notably, the title of Chapter 12 is printed throughout Chapter 13 as well; Edwin S. Porter is referred to as William S. Porter on p. 64 and in the Index; *Bunraku* is spelt *Buroraku* in Note 2, p. 75. Throughout, Burch uses not the English titles given films for release in the West (which are footnoted, though sometimes their variants are omitted) but titles which represent a closer (and sometimes revealing) translation of the Japanese originals. This system has been adopted here. ■

Film Reviews



Butch and Sundance The Early Days

Of all the drop-out, outlaws-as-heroes, counter-culture Westerns which flourished in the late 60s and early 70s, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* has probably worn least well. Its self-conscious chic, of direction, playing and theme ('outlaws—out of place and out of time, and a fast-changing world was catching up with them', as the advertising trailer roughly put it), was a short-lived but financially advantageous marriage of the whimsical with the fatalistic. By contrast, *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* was almost too sober a tract on a similar theme, although by refusing to be easily likeable it certainly looks the more interesting in retrospect. That this sequel to *Butch Cassidy*—necessarily a prelude since the first film ended with the heroes' deaths—is directed by Richard Lester might seem almost too inevitable, a promise of further japey in the face of romantic doom. After all, in his 60s films (the Beatles, *The Knack*, etc.), Lester virtually engendered the kind of movie-making—flip, disenchanted, very much *à la mode*—of which *Butch Cassidy* was one successful consequence.

But Lester has changed a good deal since then. After a period of inactivity in the early 70s, he emerged with his knack for detail intact but anchored in something other than a facility for visual wisecracking. As early as *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, Lester had claimed an interest in a kind of background realism, but it is not until *The Four Musketeers* and *Robin and Marian* that the archaeologist and the contemporary satirist really combine, significantly on subjects where historical nostalgia and a cynical realism can both be given their head. In fact, *The Four Musketeers* developed quite remarkably from a period romp into a darker, ruthlessly painful historical romance (centred on Oliver Reed's brooding, somewhat satanic Athos). Lester had proved he could deal directly with emotion in *Petulia*, but the despair of this *Musketeers* (its predecessor was altogether more benign), its sense of lethal absurdity, seemed all the sharper because Lester had previously confined this side of himself to the ready-made issues and caricatures of the 60s (*How I Won the War*, *The Bed Sitting Room*).

The opportunities offered for this kind of operation within a Western—a mythology which seems able to contain any amount of 'realistic' tinkering and readjustment—are considerable; and *Butch and Sundance The Early Days* (Fox) obligingly turns out to be more of an original and less of an adjunct to the first film than one had any right to expect. Its achievement, however, is easy to miss, since Lester seems so straightforwardly to have carried out his brief: to show the youthful Butch and Sundance developing into the lovable rogues of the William Goldman-George Roy Hill version. When we first meet them, in fact, their characters seem to be largely intact—Butch is garrulous and quick-witted, but invariably good-natured and non-violent; Sundance is taciturn and 'ornery', more the natural outlaw—and their exchanges have the distinctive Goldman flavour ('You got nothing to fear from me,' pleads Butch, while first trying to parley with the beleaguered Sundance. 'You notice that too?' comes the terse riposte). Tom Berenger and William Katt actually acquit themselves well as Newman and Redford

surrogates, a thankless task not made easier by the fact that Allan Burns' script, once having established this correspondence, simply doodles with variations on the earlier film (sequences establishing how they both acquired their outlaw names) and supplies only a rudimentary plot in which Butch is pursued by a vengeful ex-gang member.

But the prefabricated characters and episodic structure seem perfectly to suit Lester's purposes, and instead of tampering at all with our perceptions of Butch and Sundance, he leaves them to supply what momentum the film has (riding to meet their predecessors, as it were) and concentrates on the frame around them. His archaeological intentions, as in *Robin and Marian*, the *Musketeers* films and even the failed *Forum*, are easy to spot, from the sequences in Brown's Hole showing how an outlaw hideaway is run (complete with sorry-looking saloon band and cowboys morosely dancing with each other) to the way he illustrates even so incidental a scene as a train stopping at a water tower and the passengers alighting to take their ease. What is harder to define is the larger framework Lester has thrown round these random adolescent adventures—the film might play to children with the same impact as, say, *Treasure Island*—a perspective that somehow combines an enlarged sense of landscape, community and genre. It's almost as if Lester were using realistic description not to undermine Western mythology but to recreate a sense of innocent wonder about the West.

The film's two gunfights, for instance, are handled with striking immediacy and originality. The first takes place in a vast, high-ceilinged saloon where Butch, having just been released from jail on his oath not to do wrong again in Wyoming,

watches in bemused disbelief as the fledgling Sundance first tries surreptitiously to hold up a poker table and then has to shoot his way out past the guards. What is remarkable is not just the physical blundering of the action (q.v. the *Musketeers*' sword fights), but Lester's use of the eccentric space and décor at his disposal in a way distinct from every other such shoot-out. Equally unusual as an arena is the small Western township, which actually seems to be a Mormon settlement with its consistently black-clad citizens and biblical slogans painted on the rocks above, where Butch keeps his wife Mary (Jill Eikenberry) and two children and where he and Sundance flee after the latter is wounded in an ambush by the revenging O.C. Hanks (Brian Dennehy). When O.C. catches up with them and Sundance insists on facing him, the 'high noon' encounter takes place in a main street under a couple of inches of flood water, with the inhabitants frozen in the act of salvaging bits of their town to watch this strange confrontation.

Both these sequences suggest that Lester has deliberately set about reinventing his time-worn material. Elsewhere, he seems to indulge in a highly decorative approach simply for the pleasure of it. Probably the outlaws' most magical adventure is the self-contained episode beginning with their ride up to the mountain resort of Telluride, where they have decided to spend the winter after their first successful season of banditry. Butch jumps at the chance to play Robin Hood when they are held up by a quaking old man, who then breaks down and tells them a hard-luck story about his mortgaged farm; Butch hands over all their savings, which they later simply 'recover' from the bank manager. Subsequently languishing in the plausibly cultivated *ennui* of the town (as claustrophobic an environment as anything in Visconti), they volunteer to take diphtheria vaccine to snowbound miners, and are involved in freakish ski instruction from a lanky Swede who materialises out of nowhere.

The net result is that *Butch and Sundance The Early Days* becomes much more the adult fairy-tale that the makers of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* claimed they were making, with none of the latter's strenuously cute effort to advertise itself as such. It also keeps to a minimum the fatalistic intimations of what lies in store for our heroes—mainly signalled by the straw boater of their nemesis, lawman Le Fors, which is often seen bobbing in pursuit. Lester does make one harshly foreboding visual parallel when he cuts from a fast tracking shot of Butch and Sundance fleeing behind a screen of trees in a forest (after the latter has

'Butch and Sundance, The Early Days': William Katt, Tom Berenger



killed O.C.) to the bars of the prison cage which holds Mike Cassidy, Butch's outlaw mentor whose name he has appropriated. But for the most part, the film's visual attention to detail has a subtly cumulative effect—undisturbed by Lester's usual quick cutting or obvious tropes. This is first noticeable in the similarities of lighting and use of space in the opening prison scene and Butch's interrogation in the governor's luxurious suite, but emerges most affectingly later in a succession of landscapes and in a kind of emotional colour key: from the snowy wastes around Telluride to the ceiling of apple blossoms beneath which Butch and Sundance relax after the rigours of their adventure (to be caught in ambush by O.C.); from the pitiless bleached-white escarpment where Sundance lies to cauterise his own wound to the lemon-yellow abode of bliss in which he awakes in Mary's care—also to find that the moustache he has so far been vainly cultivating has reached its full growth, completing his transformation from Harry Alonzo Longbaum into the Sundance Kid.

RICHARD COMBS

Goin' South

At the beginning of *Goin' South* (CIC), Henry Moon (Jack Nicholson) is standing on the town gallows in Longhorn, Texas, when a stranger, Julia Tate (Mary Steenburgen), a prim but exceedingly determined young woman, undertakes to marry him. Thanks to a local ordinance, Moon is spared and released; Julia, however, has not saved this ramshackle outlaw for love or pity, but simply to put him down a dusty tunnel which, she believes, will one day yield gold. On that day, Julia intends to leave her Texas shack, where the straight-backed chairs are hung on the walls when not in use, for Philadelphia and a life of lady-like decorum during which, one presumes, she will be able to take her ease on comfortable, immovable sofas. Her parsimony, meanwhile, is aptly summed up by the small portion of boiled chicken Moon is served for his 'wedding' supper.

Moon, on the other hand, a one-time cook with Quantrell's Raiders, has an unfocused longing for a Mexican cantina and a life of lustful and altogether more rambunctious idleness. Although he has few illusions about what he can actually achieve, he has found a way to deal with thwarted aspirations. 'I understand about dreams,' he tells his task-mistress when, it seems, her hopes of striking gold have at last evaporated. 'And I understand about waking up, too. Didn't I want to ride with the Younger Gang and they wouldn't have me? Claimed I wasn't cut out to be a Younger. My feelings was hurt, but I accepted it.'

The unlikely partnership of these two misfit outsiders, he forever having his feelings hurt but accepting it, she forever encouraging indignities but ignoring them, provides the centre of the film. Its commanding interest, however, stems largely from the way Nicholson, here directing only his second feature (his first, *Drive, He Said*, was made as long ago as 1970), contrasts the development of this independent partnership with the ingredients of a more straightforward though neatly turned comic Western. The plot itself is an episodic and fairly formulaic affair, pared down, one imagines, rather than amplified by its authors John Herman Shaner, Al Ramrus, Charles Shyer and Alan Mandel. Its resolution hinges on whether Julia can find her gold before the approaching railroad compels her to sell the property; and having once found it, whether she can secure it from the inquisitive members of Moon's former gang.

The episodes range from the vulgar (the drenching of Julia's former suitor with a bucket of horse urine) through the more old-fashioned (a railroad official humiliated by Moon when he is caught peeking at Julia as she splashes in a river) to the downright hackneyed (Henry and Julia, who have yet to consummate their union, sheltering from a hailstorm in the mine and huddling together with the inevitable result). Against this, and indeed in contrast to the controlled excesses of Nicholson's



'Goin' South': Jack Nicholson, Mary Steenburgen

own pleasingly unbuttoned performance, the relationship between Moon and Julia is studded with moments which are alternately bizarre, tender and psychologically acute. Moon, for instance, tempers his evident desire to tumble his wife into bed, when they first arrive at her shack, with the knowledge that she has the power to send him back to the gallows. He has been struck by fortune, he realises, and perhaps for the first time in his no-hope life he seems prepared to bide his time.

Nicholson directs the scenes between himself and Mary Steenburgen with commendable restraint. Even in such a boisterous sequence as the visit to the shack of the ex-Moon Gang, whose new leader suspects that Julia and Moon have indeed struck gold, Nicholson imbues his own performance with a sort of frenetic, pained delicacy as he tries to play along with his former comrades and at the same time to convince his wife of the need to humour these ungentle guests. The delicacy reminds us that as well as deriving the outline of his subsequent comic persona from the drunken civil rights lawyer he incarnated in *Easy Rider*, the film which made his name, Nicholson gave one of his best performances as David Staebler, the dispeptic brother in *The King of Marvin Gardens*. Julia and Moon are Western prototypes, but they also register, on another level, as slightly off-centre contemporary figures. Julia is the independent single woman, with a streak of girlish naivety finding protective expression in her stubbornness; Moon is the ageing though still ebullient Yippy, who for all his selfishness can still find sympathy for the difficulties of someone else's life.

In the end, Julia attempts to make a secret getaway; but Moon, after participating in a splendidly inconsequential shoot-out between lawmen and outlaws, collars her and persuades her without much difficulty to abandon the door prospect of Philadelphia. Although they are both in love with the idea of the gold, they are both peculiarly unworldly romantics. The gold, as wealth, is important—indeed they spend most of the film squabbling about it—but once they have it in their hands, it becomes, surprisingly, a means of drawing them together. Julia recognises her selfishness in wishing to keep the largest share for herself and gallantly offers Moon, who has risked his life in the mine, a half stake; he promptly hands back the bags of dust in repayment for her having called him 'Henry' for the first time. In the long-held last shot, Julia and Moon walk towards the Rio Grande on the other side of which lies Henry's mythical cantina. One only hopes, for their own sakes, that they never actually find it.

JOHN PYM

The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover

Remarkably, given the amount of information which it manages to compress about J. Edgar Hoover's 48-year reign at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Larry Cohen's film is less interesting for its factual content than for its convoluted sense of character. What it contains is an almost indigestible smorgasbord of cameos, re-enactments, fabrications and occasional newsreel footage loosely illustrating Hoover's rise from America's gang-busting 'Top Cop' to behind-the-scenes political tyrant, making a proper meal of the yellow-journalism connections between his private life (the sexual repression) and his power plays. The film is Freudianised political history, and might even be translated (especially given its fragmented structure) into a TV mini-series about dynastic struggle. Hoover's service under eight Presidents, and his difficult father/son relationship with most other men (with Hoover moving from one side of the equation to the other at the point where Broderick Crawford takes over the role from young James Wainwright), give the hallucinating impression that the power struggles are all in the family.

Although one doubts the claims that have been made for the film's political sophistication, at the psychological level it is a fascinating and complex account, mainly because of Cohen's daring at weaving in a wealth of material. (Note his way with off-the-cuff characterisations: Franklin Roosevelt is smooth-talking, cigar-chomping bonhomie; the Kennedy boys New Frontier confidence and Method intensity in front of a blazing log fire; Nixon just one shadowed face amongst a cabal of White House aides and advisers.) Despite the film's tendency to jump about confusingly, not only between the public and the private but between different levels of stylisation (sock-it-to-'em gang-busting collages; sinister manoeuvring in the halls of power; the biographical commentary and autobiographical intrusions of the film's narrator), it maintains a consistent drive in its canny placement of scenes.

After Hoover, as a young clerk in the Justice Department, is first shown getting into political hot water when he protests the imprisonment and deportation of hundreds of aliens and suspected 'subversives' without legal counsel (they are picked up on orders which he himself has drafted), Cohen cuts in the single illustrative scene of Hoover's difficulties with women. In the apartment of Carrie DeWitt (Ronee Blakley), Hoover becomes increasingly upset by her attempted seduction, believing that she could have no interest in him except in



'The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover': William Jordan (John F. Kennedy) and Michael Parks (Robert Kennedy)

some way to entrap him, and he finally flees in confusion. This is immediately followed by Hoover being summoned by Attorney General Stone, expecting to be fired (the fuss over the aliens being elided with the sexual guilt of the previous scene) but finding instead that he is to be made head of the FBI. Cohen's stylistic notations here are broad but effective: the high overhead shot that shows a 'vulnerable' Hoover climbing the stairs with Carrie to her apartment is paired with the 'powerful' low-angle of him later rushing down the stairs—and the implications of the scene naturally colour every subsequent use of that dramatic angle for framing Hoover as a figure of authority.

Hoover's career from that point might be traced in terms of his 'family' relationships. His puritanical, legalistic sense of what is right (which has nothing to do with morality, as his later willingness to bug and smear those he considers 'subversive' will demonstrate) first leads him to clean up the FBI's reputation as the 'Bureau of Easy Virtue' and then to improve its image in the media vis-à-vis the glorified gangsters of the 30s. This bout of publicity-seeking leads him into a kind of sibling rivalry with agent Melvin Purvis (Michael Sacks), the man who kills Dillinger and who is eventually driven by Hoover's (real or imagined) persecution after he leaves the Bureau to commit suicide. There is a curious replay of this episode in Hoover's later life when he finds himself engaged in a tug-of-war with Attorney General Robert Kennedy (Michael Parks), about whom Hoover has mixed feelings and who is explicitly compared by brother Jack Kennedy to Hoover in that they both first made their names by red-baiting.

Hoover's problems with Bobby end with the death of President Kennedy—a consummation, in psychological terms, most devoutly to be wished by the Bureau chief, because in Kennedy's case it disenfranchises Bobby as 'favourite son', and because Hoover's life-long devotion to his mother seems to put him in some naturally hostile posture towards all his President fathers. The culmination of this is his determination, at the end of his career, to take the Nixon administration with him—which justifies the film's oblique hypothesis that it was his only intimate friend Clyde Tolson (Dan Dailey) who, as 'Deep Throat', helped Hoover to 'reach back from beyond the grave' and destroy Nixon with the material in his private files. Significantly, Cohen places the turning point of his film (when Broderick Crawford becomes the adult Hoover) just after the death of Hoover's mother, and marks it with a resounding speech not of his political beliefs but of his reverence towards women.

But the most significant relationship, both psychologically and in terms of the way the film is structured, is that between Hoover and the agent Dwight Webb (Rip Torn), who serves as narrator throughout the film and enters it as a character when he joins the Bureau in 1951, after the slaying of his G-man father. Much has been made of the fact that Webb is far too compromised in the latter role—his growing disillusionment with the Bureau is born as much of personal resentment as of horror at Hoover's abuse of power—to serve reliably in the former, and the audience is thus left to its own devices in assessing and judging Hoover. The film embodies no reassuring or optimistic viewpoint—as do such diverse works as Mervyn LeRoy's *The FBI Story*, whose assumptions Cohen has explicitly reversed, and *All the President's Men*. But *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover* almost demands to be approached psychoanalytically before it can be assessed politically, and in these terms it is revealing how the sins of the progeny-less Hoover come to be visited on the fatherless Webb. When the latter has an affair with a woman employee of the FBI, Hoover metes out the punishment (a downgrading) he himself expected from his flirtation with Carrie DeWitt; when Webb tries to force Hoover to see how the FBI has become a monster in its investigatory zeal, he essentially becomes the young Hoover, fighting against corruption. In this fashion, the film is forever turning back on itself in its view of Hoover, and its political irony works very much at the local level, locked into psychological contradictions. Cohen's treatment of the corruption of power is less a matter of his narrative strategy than of his sense of character, his presentation of Hoover as a villain who is also one of the few 'honest' men in relation to his own principles. The film seems to relish most those scenes which show that it was the 'liberal' administrations of Roosevelt and the Kennedys which extended Hoover's powers of illegal surveillance.

In formal terms, in fact, *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover* almost collapses in its strenuous attempt to yoke together character study, political treatise, gangbusting melodrama and the kind of historical survey which demands that we make the uncomfortable adjustment of accepting familiar actors as familiar world figures. The early gangster sequences are handled with great brio and skill—particularly the embarrassed comedy of the scene where Hoover, already America's 'Top Cop', attempts to make his first arrest—but create oddly divisive strains within the film as a whole, partly because they set up false expectations and partly

because they draw on other films (Milius' *Dillinger*, *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre*) which have dealt more satisfactorily with these particular rituals. The film overall is something of a massive contradiction—between its cheap journalistic urgency and its lush production values, including an excellent all-star cast and Miklós Rózsa score. Its keen intelligence exists in tension with its frequent confusion and haphazardness, but it remains one of the most spellbinding renovations of a B-movie format.

RICHARD COMBS

The Europeans

Cultural snobbery is so persistent that even today James Ivory might well be more revered if he had the advantage of being European (as Will Rogers said half a century ago, 'I'll put on a beard and tell 'em the picture's German'). *The Europeans* (Curzon) has the limpidity and sophistication of *Die Marquise von O...*, a good many more tones, over and under; and its own elegant visual style and values. The overtones cannot be directly compared with Henry James, just because the novel has so deliberately been made over into film in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's adaptation. James' dialogue, full of shades and suggestions, still plays a part; but the weight of the story is carried by the looks and presences and echoes and exchanges of the realised personages.

The Merchant-Ivory-Jhabvala triumvirate share with James a continuing fascination with cultural collision. (It goes from *Shakespeare Wallah* to *Autobiography of a Princess*, and is hardly surprising, seeing that Merchant is American-educated Indian; Ivory, American by birth but long based in India; Jhabvala a Polish Jew, born in Germany, educated in England, married into India, now resident in New York.) *The Europeans* is set in New England in 1850 and relates the impact on the lives of the quiet, godfearing Wentworth family caused by the visit of their cousins from Europe. Eugenia, the Baroness Munster, is on the verge of divorce from the German baron; her brother Felix is a painter, taken by his cousin Gertrude for a prince. Both are clearly all too ready to trade sophistication and aristocracy for lucrative marriages.

The New Englanders react in different ways. The puritanical Mr. Wentworth glimpses the devil's hoof; but his warnings of the dangers of contagion fall on deaf ears. All Gertrude's spirit and rebellion surface, and even her staid sister Charlotte is bewitched. Their brother Clifford is fascinated too; but for all his rusticity, he maybe sees Eugenia more clearly than does the romantic Robert Acton. In the end the New England hearts and sensibilities seem less vulnerable than European ones. Gertrude gets her Felix, with no difficulty at all in redirecting the affections of her former suitor the Reverend Brand to patient Charlotte. Eugenia returns home empty-handed; and will clearly suffer more than Acton.

The story still progresses as a series of little scenes and tableaux; though Ivory and Jhabvala have introduced their own 'big scene', a ball at Robert Acton's house. Mrs. Jhabvala has explained (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1978/79) that this is because 'you have to build up to something central, something big'; and anyway because 'Jim has to have a big party in his films.' It is in fact a very nice ball, not at all a traditional crane-up-the-camera-and-whirl-into-Strauss climax, but a real drawing room affair, with half a dozen couples rather gingerly negotiating the chairs around the fireplace. I am not convinced though whether the film really did have to 'build up to something central, something big', or whether its very nature was not the accumulation of all the little scenes, and the strain of forcing in a climax with encounters that sometimes seem too explanatory does not in fact disturb this original gentle progression. The individual scenes though are delectable: Eugenia's arrival, queening it, till the moment when she

succumbs to exhaustion from the journey, or, more likely, a premonition of failure ahead; the sweet, benign bewilderment of old Mrs. Acton faced with what could be a daughter-in-law; the ludicrous confrontation and easy reconciliation of old Wentworth and the newly assorted fiancés Felix and Gertrude, Brand and Charlotte.

'The trick,' John Huston once said, 'is in the casting.' Ivory's here is so nearly perfect that it is pointless to single out any of the roles—Lee Remick as Eugenia, Robin Ellis as Acton, Lisa Eichhorn as Gertrude. Not least the casting of the New England locations, the unbelievable colour of the autumn trees (it's a bonus that the film could not be shot in spring in this respect), the simple pride of the colonial houses with their white facades; interiors that are always correct and sometimes, like Felix's studio, astonishing. The majority of the crew, including Larry Pizer the lighting cameraman, were British, which shows what they can do given the chance.

DAVID ROBINSON

The Left-Handed Woman

There was a shot in Antonioni's *L'Eclisse* in which a light plane, steering across a sunlit airfield, left the grass trembling in its wake; the camera waited for as long as it took for the grass to become still. Fifteen years later, in Peter Handke's *The Left-Handed Woman* (*Artificial Eye*), this image (although not exactly neglected meanwhile) arrives to haunt us again; trains rush by, and the green blades of the embankment, contemplated by the camera, shiver in the slipstream. For Antonioni, the importance of the turbulence was in its passing. For Handke, the importance lies in its repetition. For both, the reference is existential—the image 'illustrates' the 'feelings' of a woman who has decided that she wishes, for the present, to be alone. (The awkward use of apostrophe—'illustrates' and 'feelings'—is necessary because in these instances the words are not even half the picture. They're a clumsy paraphrase for an image that is wordlessly articulate.)

This is Handke's first film as a director. Established as a playwright and novelist, he wrote the Wim Wenders films *The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty* and *Wrong Movement*, and says that it took him three years to compose *The Left-Handed Woman* from details fortuitously accumulated from various suburban environments. He filmed them with the help of two key members of the Wenders unit, the cameraman Robby Müller and the editor Peter Przygoda, and with a cast largely taken from productions of his plays in the German theatre. The result, as might be expected, has elements of Wenders' detachment and Fassbinder's melodrama, but unexpectedly it also has a great deal more. Handke pays cheerful, cosmopolitan allegiance to innumerable other recollections—musical, architectural, literary, and cinematic—with the result that (as with Godard in the days of *Le Mépris*) one is aware in any single shot of a composition owing something to Magritte, something to Griffith, something to Beethoven, and a kaleidoscope of somethings to other elusive familiarities, coming and going.

The drama, as it was with *L'Eclisse*, is extremely simple. A woman asks her husband to leave her alone, without explanation, to live with their 12-year-old son in their solid square house. The film spans the first three months of her experiment in solitude, during which she has visitors, copes with her son and his oafish schoolfriend, works on a translation of Flaubert, wanders the streets, says hardly anything to anybody, and spends a lot of time sitting and vaguely thinking. All else is supposition and interpretation, but one could get the impression that, after a close skirmish with lunacy, she is beginning to recover some traces of sociability by the end of the film. By that time, it is also late spring.

The seasonal reference is far from casual—Handke uses the months as chapter-headings to ensure that we note the passage of time. And again

the evocation is more than documentary; if the film owes anything to Antonioni, it owes even more to the guru of the road movies, Yasujiro Ozu. Handke's achievement has not been, as claimed in some quarters, to create a new film language, but rather to give full measure to the richness and complexity of the visual vocabulary for which Ozu has been one of the most eloquent spokesmen. It was Ozu who said 'I want to make people feel without resorting to drama'; and who proceeded to use buildings, landscapes, skies as the punctuation, indeed as the grammatical structure, of his studies of the inexpressible and the unspoken in human relationships. In *The Left-Handed Woman*, Handke takes one of the images that he'd accumulated in his three-year preparation—that of a woman falling asleep between two children at a matinée screening—and sets it in front of an extract from an early Ozu film in which the children enjoy themselves while their parents agonise. The sequence creates a vista of reflections, not least because the character most likely to notice them has fallen asleep while her son and his friend sit on either side in rapt attention. Has she missed the point? Have they become aware of it? In fact they do become marginally more tolerable from then on, relinquishing burnt cork and obscenities for an escalation of Laurel & Hardy insults upon each other that leads, properly, to affectionate reconciliation.

Later, the solitary woman recovers from an edgy, pleading visit from her husband by crouching in their sparse living-room as the camera pans to Ozu's photograph looking down from the wall. One is reminded of Wenders' comment on *The American Friend*: 'Full of love, full of hatred—so Ozu is still the myth behind it', and in turn of Ozu's gently reiterated statements about the need for a life to be loyal to itself, his reminders that selfishness, from time to time, is not necessarily a sin. As additional therapy, Handke brings in one of the great personalities of the German stage, Bernhard Minetti, whose career since the 1920s has spanned from *Godot* to *The Sunshine Boys*. Dusk gathering, in a scene of superb simplicity, he comments on the resemblances between lonely parent and daughter. 'My life took a wrong turn somewhere . . . and you'll end up just like me,' he says. The train takes him away and she is left, as usual, on the platform, directionless, purposeless, but with perhaps a better idea of how to put her life back on the rails. And in the next sequence, she goes for a chilly picnic with her son (past the Headless Woman Crossroads filmed, says Handke, because it happened to be there, but it fits), and

back home they end up in the bath together. The images have the progression of logic, which makes them stunningly beautiful.

The characters in *Left-Handed Woman* are German, living in the Clamart region of Paris, overlooking the city as if it, too, might be the kind of spectacle to inspire exhaustion. Their foreignness, linked with that of Handke, again evokes *The American Friend* and the adventures of an American and a Swiss living in Hamburg, while the perpetual thunder of trains, patrolling the suburbs like armoured guards, carries the echoes of the road movie movement, rootless, transitory, uneasy. Handke's film ends in the Metro, travellers rushing away from us, while an abrupt caption asks: 'Have you noticed that there's only room for those who make room for themselves?' A reference, of course, to something more than the habits of commuters. It runs the risk of overstatement, and like the fantasy scene in which the film's characters all assemble for a lugubrious game of chess, one might doubt its necessity. But like the grass, and for that matter like the understated performances (Edith Clever and Bruno Ganz make a persuasively tortured husband-and-wife team), it turns out to have a wholly satisfying complexity.

PHILIP STRICK

Movie Movie

Stanley Donen's *Movie Movie* (ITC) must have seemed like a good idea at the time. Take two vintage 30s plots, restage in parody of the originals, and sandwich together, complete with trailer advertising next week's colossal attraction, as an affectionate homage to the long-lost tradition of the studio double-bill. The result: a wallow in nostalgia, a lot of innocent fun, and a chance for the admirable cast—George C. Scott, Trish Van Devere, Eli Wallach—to show their versatility in contrasting roles as 'Dynamite Hands' tells of the aspiring young lawyer forced to become a boxer to pay for his sister's operation, and 'Baxter's Beauties of 1933' recreates the backstage musical.

The trouble is, it doesn't quite work out like that after a wonderfully evocative opening shot—a New York street sign, with the camera panning meaningfully over dingy urban façades and down to a bustling pavement—that comes close to pure pastiche. Somewhere off that metropolitan jungle, behind a window boldly lettered 'Dr. Carter Blaine—Eye Specialist', a girl in discreet déshabille is having her eyes tested. 'All right, she can get

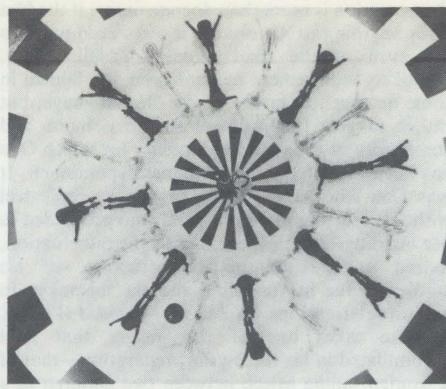
'The Left-Handed Woman': Bruno Ganz, Edith Clever



dressed now,' announces the specialist; and as delivered by Art Carney, the line carries a comic intent (*undressing* for an eye examination?) strictly at odds with the classic situation (the poor girl is losing her eyesight). A moment later, explaining to the girl's tearful Yiddisher momma, the specialist cracks wise to the effect that if any part of the human body may be said to be particularly liable to breakdown, 'I'm afraid the eyes have it.'

This is only the first of a whole string of excruciating anatomical jokes which range from a protest about the emotional blackmail of blindness ('Your sister's eyes are below the belt') to the girl's own radiant intimation of her cure ('I can see with one eye tied behind my back'). Delivered with an archness that is unfunny anyway, such lines are not only more redolent of contemporary TV comedy, they clash horribly in their smartness with the quaint 30s poetry and conversational gambits which the script occasionally captures. After a quarrel with his bespectacled (but beautiful) girlfriend, the hero humbly waylays her as she leaves the library where she works: 'If my card hasn't expired,' he pleads, 'I'd like to take out an old friend.' And when still she hesitates, he echoes a thousand heroes before him by launching ('I'd like to tell you a story...') into the age-old autobiographical parable of the poor boy who lost his way amid the bright lights of success.

There is some confusion, in other words, as to



'Movie Movie': the Busby Berkeley effect

whether the film is dealing in 30s clichés themselves, or in camp attitudes to those clichés. Fondly recreating the archetypal situations in 'Dynamite Hands' (the family dinner at which the boy is faced with sacrificing his legal career; the romantic encounter on a tenement rooftop complete with pigeons), Donen almost catches one up all over again in their naive emotional appeal, leaving one stopped short, shamefaced, only by his discreet over-emphasis (the dazzling luminosity cast, for instance, over the white costumes sported by the

gangster and the floozie who lure the hero into dreams of the high life). Meanwhile, the script by Larry Gelbart and Sheldon Keller, flaunting its disbelief in a series of snide asides, stoutly proclaims that it, at least, is no dupe to such silly goings-on.

Much more successful, perhaps because the backstage musical had its own built-in tradition of wisecracks, 'Baxter's Beauties of 1933' is, with beautiful precision, no more and no less idiotic than its models, with Michael Kidd providing some glorious (though fragmentary) numbers which include one stunning Busby Berkeley overhead (with the girls on a giant roulette wheel) and one strikingly original dance routine for bicycles. It is perhaps symptomatic of the film's uncertainty, though, that the only moments of parody, as opposed to pastiche, come with the repetition of precisely the same opening shot and romantic rooftop in both 'features'. And that the best moment in either comes when Barry Bostwick, playing an accountant who happens to be a composer who happens to be just what the show needs, launches into a manic song-and-dance demonstration of his frustrated talents which takes off where 'Moses Supposes' and 'Make 'em Laugh' left off in *Singin' in the Rain*. Now, had Donen elected to pastiche the post-Arthur Freed musical...

TOM MILNE

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By Kevin Brownlow

SECKER & WARBURG, £15.00

Designed as a companion volume to *The Parade's Gone By*, equally handsomely produced, and with equally extensive new interview material, *The War, the West, and the Wilderness* is every bit as riveting. Kevin Brownlow's silent quarry this time is documentary authenticity in all its various guises—and a tantalisingly chameleonic beast it turns out to be.

The Battle of the Somme (1916), for instance, first of the official British war films, shot by Lt. Geoffrey Malins, should be guaranteed genuine. Troubled, as were the staff at the Imperial War Museum, by doubts as to the authenticity of a shot of soldiers going over the top which has since 'appeared in almost every compilation about the First World War,' Brownlow stumbled on the answer while interviewing another veteran, Gaumont cameraman Bertram Brookes-Carrington. The latter's reminiscences confirm that the shot was almost certainly staged at a trench-mortar battery school; and as Brownlow comments, 'Little else in the Somme is faked, and for such a scene to be reconstructed suggests that censorship demanded it.'

Similarly, D. W. Griffith's *Hearts of the World* (1918) has been widely accepted on the strength of its own publicity image as a fiction film which Griffith made, at the invitation of the British government, largely on location near the front. Painstakingly sorting out probabilities from both internal evidence and the fact that Billy Bitzer wasn't allowed near the front (only Griffith himself had the necessary authorisation), Brownlow demonstrates that virtually the entire film was a reconstruction, mainly on Salisbury Plain and at the Lasky ranch in California. Not that a film, documentary or otherwise, is necessarily the worse for such subterfuge if carried out with due care and concern; which is one of the prime points pursued throughout this book.

Its focus, placed squarely under the patron saintship of Theodore Roosevelt, is the extraordinary enterprise of the early film-makers, often but not always American, who left the safety of the studios far behind them in order to film the First World War, the dying West, and the unexplored wildernesses in accordance with the charismatic Teddy's principles of, respectively, Preparedness, Conservation, and Adventure.

Pausing to take in such intriguing sidelines as 22-year-old Jessica Borthwick, who spent a lone wolf year in 1912 filming the Balkan War, and Pancho Villa, who signed an

exclusive contract with Mutual to cover his campaign (obligingly delaying his siege of Ojinaga so that their cameras could make it), the war section concentrates chiefly on 1914–1918. Fascinating descriptions of the movie war between involvement and isolationism, with Hate the Hun messages winning hands down, titles (and even plots) altered wholesale to pacify national sensibilities, and poor Robert Goldstein jailed when his dissenting *Spirit of '76* (the British inciting Indian allies to torture American patriots) opened only weeks after America finally joined Britain in the war. No authenticity here, with even Ince modelling the battles in *Civilization* on the Civil War, and even Griffith underestimating the terrifyingly vast anonymity of modern warfare in *Hearts of the World*. Then, after years of silence when war films became box-office poison, the simultaneous discovery of the truth and the drama of war in late silent masterpieces like *The Big Parade* and *Wings*, which benefited from experience, from the sobriety of the official war records, and from the hordes of veterans available as directors, actors, writers and consultants.

Perhaps even more fascinating is the Western story. First, of course, came the Eastern Westerns in which pursuit by a posse might take place on a paved road, succeeded by the new verisimilitude spearheaded by Ince and Hart. But parallel to that, as Brownlow amply documents, the extraordinary involvement in movie-making of legendary figures from the real West. Buffalo Bill Cody, who not only filmed various enactments from his Wild West show, but supervised a reconstruction of the Battle of Wounded Knee (featuring himself and as many of the survivors from both sides as could be assembled), which may have been officially suppressed as coming too uncomfortably close to the truth of the massacre. Or Emmett Dalton,

last of the notorious Dalton Gang, who twice (1912 and 1918) starred in his own story. Or, most remarkable of all, Al Jennings, the bankrobber given Western immortality of a sort by Dan Duryea in *Al Jennings of Oklahoma* (1950).

Anything but a heroic figure, as is clear from the stills depicting a diminutive, starveling desperado, and a reformed character who was determined not to glamorise the Western badman, Jennings starred in a string of films notable for their authenticity. Of the few that survive, several are outstanding according to Brownlow, not least because they are faithful to Jennings' disenchanted view: 'There wasn't any glamour in the life; there was much that was bad, much that was indifferent, and some that was good. But there wasn't any romance about it. It was hard, sordid and tragic.' The *Lady of the Dugout*, title of one of his films, refers not to a wartime trench but to a home dug in the soil of the Western prairie. 'What other Western,' Brownlow pertinently asks, 'shows a family living in such conditions?'

But romance, as Jennings demonstrated—he 'captured a fragment of social history... but he lost his audience'—and as 'documentary' film-makers soon discovered, was the first essential in cinema. The real cowboys flooding into movies as expert extras undoubtedly gave a fillip to authenticity which came to fruition in *The Covered Wagon* and *The Iron Horse*; but they were also as quick as anybody to realise that the flashier they looked and acted, the more prominently they stood out. Similarly with the intrepid movie-making explorers who set out to record the way other people and animals live, and whose exploits are recorded in the final section. Fondly recalled, often with extensive new information and with stunning stills (all the illustrations in the book are superb), are such unjustly forgotten or half-forgotten figures as Cherry

Kearton, Herbert Ponting (official photographer to Scott's Antarctic Expedition of 1910-13), Lowell Thomas (whose film of Lawrence of Arabia broke the news to an amazed Britain that she had a new national hero), or Captain J. B. L. Noel (official photographer on the 1922 and 1924 Everest expeditions).

The problem facing the 'documentarist', if he wanted either to get his work widely shown or to recoup finance for further ventures (like Flaherty, Schoedsack and Cooper, Martin and Osa Johnson), is succinctly stated by Brownlow: 'Most factual films use only one camera. To cover an incident as comprehensively as a feature film is impossible without restaging the incident. The audience thus finds the result flat by comparison with its fictional counterpart, like a newsreel of a horse race compared with the chariot race in *Ben-Hur*. The factual filmmaker is thus driven to artifice to recover some of this lost ground.'

Schoedsack and Cooper thus graduated by easy stages from the pure documentary of *Grass* (1926) to the pure fiction of *King Kong* (1933). Who's complaining about the exchange? Well, nobody really, except that as Brownlow persuasively argues, the complex interplay of fiction and fact that pervaded so many films during the silent period—abruptly ended by the emergence of back-projection—makes them not merely uniquely entertaining but a unique source of historical information which, after years of neglect which saw so many films vanish forever, is still fighting for the right to be recognised as such and duly preserved.

TOM MILNE

JORGE LUIS BORGES: SUR LE CINEMA

By Edgardo Cozarinsky

EDITIONS ALBATROS, PARIS, 39fr.

Imagine the delighted surprise of some do-it-yourself expert who also happened to be a fan of Proust on coming across the famous passage on carpentry in *Du Côté de chez Swann*. How his pulse would quicken, how furiously he would unravel the tortuous sentences—at last he was to discover what his idol thought of double varnishing...

Of course, no such outlandish passage exists (though Proust himself mentions just this kind of wishfulfilment fantasy *à propos* of Marcel's admiration for Bergotte). Literature is basically about language, and the textual single-mindedness of 20th century literature in particular precludes documentary description. Even more occasional works—memoirs, journals—rarely seem to be *about* anything. Take films, for example. When one considers the impressive roster of modern writers who have worked for or around the cinema, it is astonishing how few ever jotted down more than a casual aside on the subject; and those who did were often forced by professional duties (Graham Greene) or ties of friendship (Cocteau) to invest much of their wit and intelligence in ephemera.

Which is why only the incorrigible filmworm—as one says 'bookworm'—haunting the airless cloisters of movie Academe can fail to be enchanted by the publication of Borges' collected criticism in Edgardo Cozarinsky's *Jorge Luis Borges: sur le cinéma*. (But when an English translation?)

Borges was official film critic of the Argentinian literary magazine *Sur* on and off from 1931 to 1944; or rather, reviewer, as he rarely extended himself beyond 500 words and never wrote even a vaguely theoretical text. Naturally, a fair amount of trash fell to his lot, which he sometimes puzzlingly admired (of *The Petrified Forest*—Death, in this film, acts like hypnosis or alcohol: it brings to light the recesses of the soul') but mostly dismissed with a laconic putdown (of a forgotten local effort—"It is without doubt one of the best Argentine films I have ever seen: which is to say, one of the worst films ever made"). But it never curbed his enthusiasm; on the contrary, his review of *Now Voyager*, a prize specimen of the durable ephemera in which Hollywood has been so rich, is a miniature *tour de force* of self-parody. It begins like one of his own fictions—"It is said that the doctrine of the transmigration of souls and that of circular time—or The Eternal Return—were suggested by paramnesia, by a painful and sudden impression of having lived the present moment before; in Buenos Aires, at 6.30 and 10.45 p.m., there is not a single cinema spectator who does not have this impression." Then, discoursing on recurrent movie archetypes as solemnly as if they were Homeric metaphors, he finally reveals what he calls the 'vigorous message' of *Now Voyager*: *When Bette Davis is disfigured, she is less beautiful*.

As Biyo Casares, his old comrade in literature, infers in his preface, it was without rancour that Borges considered himself at the cinema 'a reader of Madame Dell' (whose English equivalent would be Ethel M. Dell). He believed that the epic style lived on in Westerns and thrillers (preferring Sternberg's first films 'with Chicago gangsters dying bravely' to those with Marlene) and acknowledged their influence on his later, more realistic stories. Like a true *cinéphile*, Borges frequented the cinema as an alternative reality, in which one would not always care to live on the heights. It was with the vast Hollywood subtext, that grid of pure conventions, that he was most at ease; and possibly, after all, no parody was intended in the *Now Voyager* review. Certainly, he was much less generous to since recognised classics: *City Lights*, *Morocco*, *Citizen Kane* ('a work of genius in the most German sense of the word') all met with qualified disapproval, as did adaptations of his heroes, Wells and Stevenson (though in *Things to Come* he appreciates a formation of planes 'as obscene as lobsters'). Brilliant as they are, these pieces suggest the slightly pedantic man-of-letters rather than the brilliant fantasist who could end his review of some obscure nonentity with a cosmic epigram that sends shivers up the reader's spine—a device as cheap,



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some factual information
trying to get out. . .
Most of it gets into the

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perhaps, but as effective as the sudden gust of wind that, in biblical epics, signals an approaching miracle.

It would seem, in fact, that Borges was also influenced by journalistic constraints: constructing précis of films one need scarcely see, as his stories were précis of novels he never felt like writing. And, in his criticism of Victor Fleming's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, he conceives of 'a pantheist film whose numerous characters, at the end, become One, who is eternal.' This was to form, thirty years later, the basis of his script for Hugo Santiago's *Les Autres*.

As well as an excellent introduction, Cozalinsky has written brief critical studies of this film and the (surprisingly) seven others on which Borges worked or which were adapted from his stories. Finally, there is an extremely diverting double essay in which he turns his attention from Borges himself to his ubiquitous *alter ego* 'Borgesian', tracing the origin of the word's usage in contemporary film-making and criticism to the Cuban Guillermo Cabrera Infante and, in Europe, its trivialisation from *Les Carabiniers* to *Don't Look Back*, from *Cahiers du Cinéma* to *Movie*, until, by a process analogous to that of 'The Approach to Al'mutasim' but in reverse, it has joined 'Dickensian', 'Pirandellian' and 'Kafkaesque' in a limbo of insignificance.

GILBERT ADAIR

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S SCREENPLAY FOR THREE COMRADES

Edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS, \$10.00

It was their dispute over the screenplay for *Three Comrades* that prompted F. Scott Fitzgerald to make his famous protest to producer Joseph Mankiewicz, 'I'm a good writer—honest'. In fact, Fitzgerald's correspondence, with Mankiewicz and E. E. Paramore (the writer he was assigned as a 'collaborator' on the many revisions to his first draft adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque's novel), is filled with increasingly pathetic declarations of his credentials for the job in hand: 'I didn't write four out of four best sellers or a hundred and fifty top-price short stories out of the mind of a temperamental child without taste or judgment.'

History has, by and large, stood up for Fitzgerald as another example of the literary talent Hollywood loves to grind down and spit out. Despite Fitzgerald's displeasure with the final script, *Three Comrades* was the only film on which he received screen credit, although prior to this expedition (in 1937) he had already been lured twice to Hollywood (in 1927 and 1931), and altogether laboured on nearly twenty projects, most of which were never made while others were made from other scripts (*The Women*, *Madame Curie*) and a few simply involved dialogue polishing (*Gone With the Wind*, *Raffles*). Mankiewicz, for his part, has also

felt hard done by: 'I personally have been attacked as if I had spat on the flag because it happened once that I rewrote some dialogue by F. Scott Fitzgerald. But it needed it! . . . Scott Fitzgerald really wrote very bad spoken dialogue.'

They were both right, to judge by this published edition of Fitzgerald's own first screenplay. What Fitzgerald was evidently after was a fineness of feeling and a doomed romanticism in the story's central love affair (between Robert Taylor and Margaret Sullavan) which was undoubtedly compromised by structural changes and rewriting. Having the lovers get married before he discovers that she has an incurable disease implies, as Fitzgerald predicted, that 'Bobby [Erich in the film] has bought a piece of damaged goods . . . In that case their subsequent struggle is imposed on them by outside circumstances and is not nearly as romantic as if of tragedy hanging over them'. The comradeship of the three friends tends in the finished film to be sentimentally reassuring of the couple, rather than pessimistically suggesting that theirs might be the last chance for love in a doomed world. On the other hand, Fitzgerald's writing does have an attenuated, laborious quality—the effort to dramatise the distilled romantic experience of his novels gives the impression that the lovers are frozen in aspic, and Fitzgerald's discomfort with images might be deduced from his whimsical notion of showing a switchboard operated in turn by an angel and a satyr during the couple's first, tentative telephone conversation.

What seems to have defeated Fitzgerald, as much as subsequent adapters of the author's novels, is finding a way to render his own fictional 'voice' in film—that peculiar combination of emotional closeness and intellectual distance, of headlong rush and wistful reflection. Lacking the capacity here to conjure both his lovers' dream and its limits in time and place, as he does in a few sentences in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald is reduced to heavily literal notations: an establishing sequence showing Patricia's undernourished childhood in post-war Germany (and her crossing paths for the first time with the three comrades); tedious scenes of the political manoeuvring going on for control of the city. None of this material was finally included in the film, and one cannot help thinking that it was just as well.

Along with the original script, this volume helpfully includes a number of the subsequent revisions which so provoked Fitzgerald's ire. His objections are shown to range from the infinitesimally picky (the slight rearrangement of dialogue) to the understandably peevish (references to the Deity creeping into the heart-tugging scenes) and justifiable resistance to more major changes in tone (the disappearance of scene-setting characters, such as a sluttish man-curiest). What has not been included is any reference to the film as finally shot by Frank Borzage; the prologue actually makes the curious assumption that the book's most likely reader will be someone interested in

how Remarque's novel has been adapted (and is advised to have a copy of the novel open alongside the script) while Borzage is dismissed in one sentence as having no control over the script. As a romantic sensibility possibly more intense and less qualified, more optimistic and less brittle than Fitzgerald, Borzage was probably responsible in the end for much of the film's emotional coherence, and certainly for the expressionist intensity with which its rather vague political aspect is realised. But despite being one of his better known, *Three Comrades* is not one of his best works. It might be reasonable to assume that the script's gradual conversion into a more pragmatic and conventional romance which grounded Fitzgerald's poetry also confined Borzage's own.

RICHARD COMBS

FILM COLLECTING

By Gerald McKee

A. S. BARNES/TANTIVY PRESS, £6.95

Film collectors are a secretive lot. Their activity is proscribed. The film industry detests them, and the moment they step over the permitted boundaries and start dealing in copyrighted films, they face arrest. So it is no wonder that books on film collecting can be counted on the fingers of one thumb. All the more to Gerald McKee's credit that he has had the courage—and the patience—to tackle the subject. It is far from easy. For film collecting embraces film history. All of it.

In 1912 you could purchase the Pathé KOK, a projector designed to resemble a sewing machine, so it would not offend the eye in a tastefully furnished home. It projected 28 mm film with a pictorial quality similar to that of 35 mm. No electricity was required—you cranked the handle until your strength gave out, and you were thus the source of power for a built-in dynamo. The first 28 mm releases covered the earliest years of the cinema. Gradually the library became more comprehensive, and included the Pearl White serial *The Perils of Pauline*. The original 35 mm prints were lost, and the film only survives today because it was released on 28 mm.

Thanks to his qualifications as a photographer, Gerald McKee is the ideal man to discuss the photographic image; the way a film looked on the cinema screen, and the way it looks at home. The difference is often astounding, for reduction-printing has not improved since the days of 28 mm. Racketeering dealers put out anything that moves. 8 mm prints of Murnau's *Faust* have been duped so often it is hard to tell where the titles end and the picture starts. Such contempt for the cinema did not exist when 9.5 mm first appeared in 1923. Films were abridged with care and printed with enormous skill—some were tinted by hand, despite the minuscule size of the frame. Pathé-Baby and Pathéscope releases covered the entire spectrum of European film-making, from UFA classics to Abel Gance's *Napoleon*, and such unjustly forgotten

ten masterpieces as Raymond Bernard's *The Chess Player* and Jacques Feyder's *Children's Faces*.

McKee has sensibly restricted his field to this 'permitted' area, films released on sub-standard gauges and sold on the open market. Because he goes back to the beginning, his book will be a revelation to students of film history. Not only does he describe rare collectors' items—he illustrates them with frame enlargements. A few of these show more scratches than picture, but many are outstanding. McKee is an experienced industrial photographer, and the best of his frame enlargements should serve as an object lesson for archives and film libraries. He has an eye for a striking shot, and he seldom chooses well-known scenes.

McKee's book is not only entertaining, it is extremely useful. He takes you on a guided tour of the gauges, and besides lingering over antique treasures, he gives full details of modern releases. He warns of the legal dangers inherent in collecting 16 mm sound films, and gives advice on how to obtain them legitimately. He reserves his affection, however, for the silent era, and takes fascinating detours into the careers of such disparate characters as Ivan Mosjoukine and Snub Pollard.

I advise you to buy this book at the current price. In a few years, it will be out of print and the dealers will have it—at vastly inflated prices. And not long after that, I predict, the book will be photocopied and—just like 8 mm—the first invisible dupes will come on the market.

KEVIN BROWNLOW

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

IAN BURUMA is a Dutch specialist in Japanese cinema and theatre, who has also taken photographs to illustrate Donald Richie's book on Japanese tattoos . . . PAUL GELDER is film critic for the Barnet Press and is writing a book about Lotte Reiniger . . . PETER HAMES is Principal Lecturer in Film at the North Staffordshire Polytechnic and programme organiser of Stoke Film Theatre . . . JOHN HOWKINS is a journalist attached to the International Institute of Communications . . . JAMES LEAHY is Director of Film Studies at the Slade School of Fine Art . . . ANGELA MARTIN works at the BFI as Assistant Editor in the Education Advisory Service . . . SCOTT MEEK is Feature Films Officer of the National Film Archive and recently visited China to view films for a historical retrospective of Chinese films to be staged at the NFT early in 1980 . . . NEIL SINYARD teaches English Literature and film at West Midlands College . . . MAX TESSIER is a regular contributor to the French magazine *Ecran 78* and is writing a book on Japanese cinema . . . ADRIAN TURNER is a Programme Officer at the National Film Theatre . . . WILLIAM F. VAN WERT teaches film and creative writing at Temple University, Philadelphia. He has published books on Robbe-Grillet and on *The Theory and Practice of the Ciné-Roman*.

Television May Never be the Same Again

from page 150

purchase the new goodies. But their gains may be the wider society's loss. The mass may have neither the money nor the ability to purchase the new offerings. They may have no alternative but to continue to be served with the common diet from which the plums have been extracted. The Lincoln Centre in the United States, for instance, is planning to switch its productions from the public broadcasting service (PBS) to Pay-TV. The PBS shows are delivered, at no transactional cost, to all householders; the Pay-TV shows will cost around \$10, and reach only those who pay. The Pay-TV shows will probably have better stars—and be delivered more quickly than the former shows. And the Lincoln Centre (and the stars) gets more money. But the people who do not pay \$10 have lost, forever.

The question here is whether the new media will serve a country's desires, wants and needs and the artist's ambitions to create performance and message. Traditional over-the-air

television provides a benchmark. The popularity of peak-time television ensures that virtually every programme (an opera, *Days of Hope*, *TV Eye*, a party political broadcast) gets a very large audience. It also generates an experience which, across the country, can be more intense than in any other medium. The drawback (or one of them) is that over-the-air television is useless at serving small audiences.

Research into viewing habits is always controversial; but we are fairly certain now that people watch according to their social/familial habits, not according to their judgments of the available programmes. Good TV plays will not be watched by more people than watch bad TV plays, in ordinary circumstances. And a series aimed at photographers or philatelists will not necessarily attract more photographers or philatelists than a series on something completely different; the main audience for both series will simply be the people who watch (a lot of) television. *Pot Black* was not made a hit by the numbers of snooker players who were watching but by the numbers of people who

liked to watch a television programme about snooker. If *Pot Black* had been distributed only on disc or cassette, or as an educational short film and aimed at snooker players, it would have failed. For snooker players it would have been too populist in comparison with the real thing and in comparison with more advanced material; while non-players would not have been in a position to watch it.

The trick of policy is to ensure that the range of media (old and new) provide all these materials to whatever audience desires it—even if they do not know they desire it. Oddly, the increase in the number of media has not made this task any easier. Audiences are actually more ambitious than artists, and more powerful too, in pushing for the kind of shifts in resources and messages that are required. The cash nexus of transactionality may be the mechanism by which the market constrains supply and demand towards some kind of equilibrium. Television may never be the same again. Actually, it's more than likely that it will be exactly the same for some years to come. But the audiences would seem to be backing Méliès rather than Lumière. ■



Rotha on Grierson

SIR.—The review by Paul Rotha in your Spring 1979 issue of Forsyth Hardy's biography of John Grierson merits review if not revision. Rotha complains Hardy's book is dour and lacking in dynamic and does not bring out Grierson's pleasing sides or show that he was an excellent adroit actor. Can we be reading the same book? With engaging naïveté Mr. R. follows those remarks with a recollection of Grierson insisting on buying him (Rotha) bottles of brandy during meetings at the Bear in Devizes to discuss his (Rotha's?) books. Generous, intemperate but hardly dynamic.

Mr. R. praises Mr. Grierson's words as recorded by Hardy as essential reading by bureaucrats. Surely the selection of pungent views is the basic task of the competent biographer which Hardy assuredly is. The clout inherent in Grierson's writings and speeches should not be discovered anew by someone who knew the subject for almost fifty years.

There is little in the review which is not about Rotha, his hip flask, his intercession with Sir John Boyd Orr on Grierson's behalf, his meeting with Mrs. Frances Strauss, the books and LPs Grierson gave him and more, much more. These memories, poignant as they may be to Mr. R., offer small homage to a masterly biographic work, an absorbing, compassionate account of a life rich in accomplishment, often rent with

conflict but, withal, uplifting, even noble in purpose. The legend of Grierson lives and grows and Forsyth Hardy has laid it all out for us in this excellent history of a great film-maker.

Yours faithfully,
ALAN FIELD
Nanaimo, B.C., Canada.

P.S. For your information, I was one of the NFB people Rotha refers to who did not have the pleasure of meeting him. I was hired by Grierson in 1942 and stayed with the NFB until October 1950. At times I was secretary of the Board, producer of the *Canada Carries On* series and responsible for newsreel coverage of Canada's war effort.

SIR.—Paul Rotha's review of my biography of John Grierson is mainly about Paul Rotha. However, in so far as it relates to the book (and as SIGHT AND SOUND should have the record straight):

There was no 'Mrs' Frances Strauss. She married Mordecai Gorenstein.

Professor Charles E. Merriam's name is correctly spelt on pp 31 and 136 and in the Index.

I do not say that Grierson met Sir Stafford Cripps.

I do not say that the first Films of Scotland series was made while Grierson was at the GPO Film Unit.

Basil Wright has confirmed to me that the facts I give about the World Union of Documentary are correct.

The photograph of Chaplin is there largely because Grierson's interest in the cinema was first aroused by a Chaplin film. They met in Hollywood and remained friends. Chaplin gave Grierson the right to use material from his films in *This Wonderful World* before they were shown anywhere on television.

I have an account in a private letter of Grierson's opinion of *World Without End* which I did not think it would be helpful to quote.

With the exception of the mis-

attribution of the direction of Alex Shaw's *The Children's Story*, other points made by Paul Rotha are matters of opinion, or assertion. I have substantial reasons for taking a different stance on them than he does.

I am pleased to know that, despite his cavils, he considers the book well done.

Yours faithfully,
FORSYTH HARDY
Edinburgh.

The Groves of Academe

SIR.—I was disturbed to read John Russell Taylor's ill-considered condemnation of American academic film criticism in his review essay 'The Graves of Academe' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1978-79). Whilst on the one hand Professor Taylor objects to 'that dreadful American academic style', he admits, on the other, to having taught at the University of Southern California. With two such superb stylists as Arthur Knight and John Russell Taylor on the faculty at USC, one would suppose that those 'dreadful' young graduate students might have been taught something about how to write effectively and engagingly.

Not so, apparently. At issue here, I believe, is a question of academic responsibility; and in my opinion it is 'dreadful' to see an accomplished writer ridicule the meagre efforts of the less experienced and (perhaps) less gifted. I should think a graduate faculty would be delighted to see the work of its progeny in print. Now if Professor Taylor served on Brent Maddock's committee at USC and considered the man's work on Jacques Tati to be 'turgid and humourless', and if he knew that the thesis might eventually be published, shouldn't one reasonably expect Professor Taylor and other members of that committee to encourage Mr. Maddock, to suggest revisions and improvements, and to work with him on matters of style and content? By condemning the work of Brent

Maddock in print, Professor Taylor, it seems to me, is in fact condemning himself and his colleagues. Even so, one American reviewer praised Maddock's book for providing 'the fullest examination available of Tati's comic genius.' (Choice, September 1978).

Professor Taylor extends his criticism to the first three monographs in the Twayne Theatrical Arts Series, but that criticism I believe to be superficial and unfair. He condemns the series (as others have done) by condemning the obvious flaw in John Francis Kriedl's book *Nicholas Ray*, over half of which is given to an extended discussion of *Rebel Without a Cause*. That is Kriedl's organisational flaw, but does it have anything to do, I wonder, with the other series books on G. W. Pabst and Francis Ford Coppola?

There are of course other more experienced and professional 'academic' writers in American cinema studies, and one wonders how Gerald Mast or Robert Sklar might fit into Professor Taylor's critical scheme. They are not, like Ian Jarvie, redeemed by being 'British domiciled in Canada'. But to my point: the real problem with John Russell Taylor's little review is that it creates impressions that the reviewer probably did not intend. Besides seeming smug and a little chauvinistic, it is wonderfully patronising, and it leads one to believe the writer may be astonishingly contemptuous of his students, as (I would imagine) is surely not the case. The 'groves of academe' may indeed produce bitter fruit, but only if they are not properly tended by the groundskeepers.

Yours faithfully,
JAMES M. WELSH
Salisbury State College, U.S.A.

Television at Edinburgh

SIR.—Rod Allen's letter about the 1978 Edinburgh Television Festival (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1979) exemplifies the attitude I deplored in my article. Of course television

practitioners should be prepared, and perhaps even eager, to explain themselves in public, in appropriate forums. Of course the gag clauses in BBC and ITCA contracts are demeaning. But it is for those who sign them to decide if and under what circumstances their terms are to be ignored. And given the relentless presence of the BBC's cameras, does Rod Allen really think he was under no obligation to explain to delegates what his team was doing, and why?

Yours faithfully,

JERRY KUEHL

London, N.W.6.

Lang and Expressionism

SIR,—Apropos the article on German screen expressionism in the piece 'From Caligari to Who?' by Barry Salt (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1979), I thought the following anecdote might amuse (and perhaps even 'enlighten') your readers on the subject, at least as far as it concerns Fritz Lang.

In 1967 I was with Mr. Lang at the Montreal Film Festival, where he was one of the three guests of honour of the festival, the other two being John Ford and Jean Renoir. One day a cable came for Lang, inviting him to a symposium on German screen expressionism, at which he would be the principal speaker. It was signed by Lotte Eisner. On the day he was to fly to Berlin for the event, I accompanied him in a taxi to the airport. 'Quick,' he said, 'tell me, what is "expressionism"? What does

Lotte mean by that?' 'You're kidding,' I replied. 'You, the great Pooh-Bah of German screen expressionism, ask me a question like that—and at a time like this? We'll be at the airport in a few minutes!' 'Come on, quick!' he said. 'I wouldn't kid about a thing like this. Tell me—I have to say something.' So in the remaining few minutes I tried to give him a 'crash course' in the art movement, expressionism, that heightened reality which I told him was rooted in the miasma of Verdun in 1915–16 out of which came that black flower of German screen expressionism, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Well, and so forth. Lotte wrote me later that he delivered an eloquent speech on the subject.

The point of it all is that Lang, like other of the big directors—Chaplin and Stroheim come immediately to mind—didn't know the big words (certainly not like the intellectual Eisenstein did). They knew only one thing: how to make good films.

Yours faithfully,
HERMAN WEINBERG

New York.

Paul Fejös

SIR,—Mrs. Lita Osmundsen, widow of the late Paul Fejös, has drawn my attention to what she feels is a misinterpretation of the ending of *Marie* in my article 'Fejös' in the Summer 1978 SIGHT AND SOUND.

Mrs. Osmundsen says that, in Fejös' own view, the fact that 'Marie ends up in heaven scrubbing the heavenly floor with a spangling brush

and a golden bucket of water was a logical metaphoric extension of her ultimate reward because, as he put it, she re-experienced in heaven that part of her life when she was happiest and most ecstatic, which was what heaven was taken to mean. It was by no means for him "tongue in cheek", but rather that the values, the meaning and happiness of our lives, takes place in a variety of settings and it is our own response in rising over such settings and constraints that gives us our immortality.'

I hope you will be able to print this information which, Mrs. Osmundsen kindly adds, is 'not inconsistent with the quality of [my] interpretation.'

Yours faithfully,
GRAHAM PETRIE

Hamilton, Ontario

Nosferatu

SIR,—In your Autumn 1978 issue, you were the first, I think (closely followed by *American Film*), to publish a report on the new *Nosferatu*. It made me anticipate the film by Werner Herzog, in whom I believe. Came January 1979 for the world première in Paris, with well-planned publicity. After a few weeks, public attendance was well below expectations. Established critics simply caressed Herzog by way of Murnau. I finally saw the remake, and at the Cinémathèque saw again the original. Well, Werner Herzog turned out to be 'a dusty old mummy', all the troubles during the shooting, and Lotte Eisner's blessing notwithstanding, to make Murnau rise up ever the Young.

I became immediately suspicious as a gallery of mummies (so effective in Rosi's *Cadavres Exquis*), and a slow-motion bat on a blue background, accompanied the credits. But Herzog's terrible mistake is this almost shot by shot copying of

the Murnau film, which minute by minute counted his fall. Just compare Max Schreck and Klaus Kinski in such celebrated shots as that from below the ship's hull, or clutching the bars of a window. Or the ship gliding into town, to which Herzog added some 'cracks and booms' to the soundtrack as it scrapes to a standstill. And those sails turning (obviously) damn red. I started hearing Tab Hunter crooning 'Red Sails in the Sunset' within my head.

Klaus Kinski 'hamming up' the 'non-acting style' is unpardonable. Kinski on a raft full of apes in *Aguirre*, a thousand times yes, but Kinski and the ten thousand rats of *Nosferatu* (like some C. B. DeMille epic) no, though not because of those delightful rats. And I once saw Kinski playing a memorable Renfield in an all-white asylum to Christopher Lee's Dracula, Spanish produced.

I long to choose among the maybe trash versions of *Dracula* on today's stage and screen with Frank Langella, Louis Jourdan, Terence Stamp, Raoul Julia, Georges Chakiris and Hamilton. It certainly is no accident Herzog made *Nosferatu*. In Paris, the cinema La Pagode had the good sense to show both *Nosferatu*.

Yours faithfully,

J. A. LIMAS

Paris.

John Ford's War

We have been asked to point out that Robert Parrish's book *Growing Up in Hollywood*, from which Andrew Sinclair drew considerably in his article 'John Ford's War' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1979), is available in hard covers published by The Bodley Head at £4.95 and will be published in paperback as a Triad-Panther in January 1980.

HUNGAROFILM for *The Good Neighbour*.
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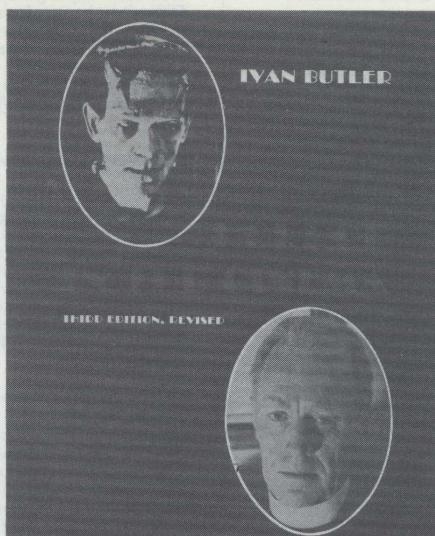
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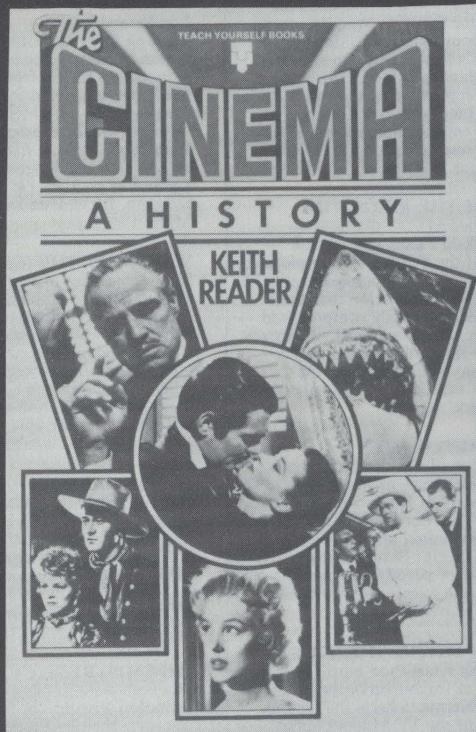
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AGATHA (*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)
The whys and wherefores of Agatha Christie's brief disappearance in 1926, fictitiously elaborated with much regard for period detail, too little for actual substance. And it remains hard to associate Vanessa Redgrave with the creator of Miss Marple. (Dustin Hoffman, Helen Morse; director, Michael Apted.)

BIG WEDNESDAY (*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)
John Milius' autobiographical celebration of three comrades, Californian surfers who refuse to grow up during the 60s. The title refers to the day they surf that unique wave which finally allows them to abandon their violent, lotus-eating youth; the film vainly tries to palm off callowness as heroism. (Jan Michael Vincent, Gary Busey, William Katt.)

BLOODBROTHERS (*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)
Robert Mulligan places a magnifier over a feuding working-class Italian family from the Bronx and reveals mainly some excessively noisy caricatures. Richard Gere, the son on whom all hopes are pinned, listlessly tries to decide whether to submit to the family or strike out alone. (Tony Lo Bianco, Paul Sorvino, Lelia Goldoni.)

BRINK'S JOB, THE (*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)
Or, perhaps, *The Night They Raided Brink's*. William Friedkin back in laboured slapstick mood, jostling a reconstruction of the famous \$2.7 million heist into farce, frittering away suspense and irony in favour of a limply paced period caper. (Peter Falk, Peter Boyle, Warren Oates.)

BUDDY HOLLY STORY, THE (*Entertainment*)
While rock 'n' roll buffs may chafe at factual liberties, this biopic contains an energy, surrounding and infusing the timeless music, that most recent rock movies have missed. Gary Busey, Don Stroud and Charlie Martin Smith make irresistible cinematic Crickets. (Director, Steve Rash.)

BUTCH AND SUNDANCE—THE EARLY DAYS (*Fox*)
A doubling back to pick up the trail of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid before their Newman-Redford incarnations. Predictably, lookalikes Tom Berenger and William Katt play exactly the same characters, but Richard Lester fills in their life and times with wit, atmosphere and remarkably little indulgence. (Jeff Corey, Jill Eikenberry.) *Reviewed.*

CASEY'S SHADOW (*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)
Martin Ritt skating over thin ice with boy-loves-horse story, but avoiding most of the danger spots thanks to an unsentimental cast (acerbically led by Walter Matthau), evocative Louisiana settings, and his own lazy eye for detail. (Alexis Smith, Robert Webber, Andrew E. Rubin.)

CHAMP, THE (*CIC*)
Franco Zeffirelli's updated remake of the Wallace Beery/Jackie Cooper weepie, lyrically photographed but with a script awash with tears. Jon Voight comes out fighting, but is too pretty and too bright to be convincing as the has-been boxer, while Faye

Dunaway and the rest of the cast flounder in a sea of mauldin sentimentality. (Ricky Schroder.)

CLASS OF MISS MACMICHAEL, THE (*Gala*)
A strangely misjudged attempt to wring both comedy and social awareness out of a problem school setting, with Silvio Narizzano virtually giving up in the face of a sledgehammer script and an over-the-top performance by Oliver Reed as a tyrannical headmaster. Glenda Jackson is at her most stoical, and the only spirited playing comes from the kids. (Michael Murphy.)

DAYS OF HEAVEN (*CIC*)
Terrence Malick's innocently convoluted parable of love lost and found, and reconciliation achieved and then fatally broken, is superbly counterpointed, thanks to Nestor Almendros' photography, by the burgeoning expansiveness of Texas during the First War. The whole is masterfully united by the random comments of a girl sharing the principals' brief paradise. (Brooke Adams, Richard Gere, Sam Shepard.)

DON'S PARTY (*Miracle*)
David Williamson's adaptation of his own stage play is full of ruderies about the failure of socialism and the general inadequacy of the (Australian) male. Boisterous, irreverent and occasionally stinging, Bruce Beresford's film finally cancels itself out in the sheer boorishness of alcoholic oratory. (Ray Barrett, John Hargreaves.)

ERASERHEAD (*Mainline*)
Seductively repugnant nightmare horror: the urban family melodrama treated as a post-psychological, post-punk battleground of primal anxieties. Luminous black-and-white photography enhances the obscene beauties as cataclysmic hero learns to live with decidedly inhuman 'baby'. (John Nance, Charlotte Stewart; director, David Lynch.)

FIREPOWER (*ITC*)
Mindless international intrigue, although the spectacular pyrotechnics are a welcome diversion from the absurdly schematic plot and the fading charisma of James Coburn, while Michael Winner is at least back on surer ground after the pretensions of *The Big Sleep* and other recent disasters. (Sophia Loren.)

GETTING OF WISDOM, THE (*Tedderwick*)
The naive exuberance of its star (Susannah Fowle) almost carries the day in this carefully mounted adaptation of Henry Handel Richardson's autobiographical novel of a girl's unhappy maturing at a snobbish Melbourne academy. The awfulness of institutional life is underlined rather too often. (John Waters, Sheila Helpman, Barry Humphries; director, Bruce Beresford.)

GGIN' SOUTH (*CIC*)
In a rich season so far for Westerns, *Goin' South* is the most unpredictable, skittering from low comedy (Jack Nicholson grimaces and prances outrageously) to choice lyricism. Director Nicholson switches genres (from campus revolt in his debut, *Drive, He Said*) with perfect ease and raucously funny local detail. (Mary Steenburgen, John Belushi.) *Reviewed.*

HARDCORE LIFE, THE (*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)
As *Blue Collar* proved, Paul Schrader is unable to direct his own high-minded but specious moralities with the same mind-numbing style as others. Here Mid-West Calvinist father George C. Scott takes on the West Coast porn industry to rescue his daughter, but moral contrast loses out to thick-ear contest and distasteful titillation. (Peter Boyle, Season Hubley.)

HULLABALOO OVER GEORGIE AND BONNIE'S PICTURES (*Contemporary*)
An exquisite little rondo on the theme of art versus life, full of magically

funny and touching Jamesian reverberations in which the ghost of the British Raj is gently exorcised. Difficult to know which to praise most: James Ivory's direction, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's screenplay, Walter Lassally's camerawork, or the superlative cast. (Peggy Ashcroft, Aparna Sen, Saeed Jaffrey, Victor Banerjee.)

ICE CASTLES (*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)

An apparently stock glycerine tale of young love, Olympic figure-skating prospects and accidental blindness given an unexpected edge of ironic melodrama by TV graduate Donald Wrye. Accomplished shifts of tone and some acute dialogue add up to an ambitious social and genre critique. (Robby Benson, Lynn-Holly Johnson, Tom Skerritt.)

I NEVER PROMISED YOU A ROSE GARDEN (*New World*)

But it's roses, roses, all the way in this glib, old-fashioned account of a teenage schizoid coming out of her terrors under the beautiful guidance of Dr. Bibi Andersson. Fortunately, Kathleen Quinlan's performance has all the tact and potency lacking in the script and direction. (Director, Anthony Page.)

LADY VANISHES, THE (*Rank*)

Hitchcock struck just the right popular note with this material some forty years ago, though the creakiness of his version is inadvertently emphasised by this plush remake. Comedy and drama are more muddled than ever when the villains become actual Nazis, and Elliott Gould and Cybill Shepherd are limply cast as a 30s Hollywood 'crazy' couple. (Angela Lansbury, Herbert Lom; director, Anthony Page.)

LAST SUPPER, THE (*Connoisseur*)

The Christian notion of the sanctity of suffering is brilliantly dissected during a mock Last Supper held for the slaves of an 18th century Cuban sugar plantation and presided over by the engaging, tyrannical owner (Nelson Villagra). T. G. Alea is a brilliant Devil's Advocate, but is nevertheless constrained to add an unambiguous final flourish in praise of the new Cuba.

LEFT-HANDED WOMAN, THE (*Artificial Eye*)

Peter Handke, source and one-time collaborator for Wim Wenders, turns out a curious first film as director: as a 'woman's film' it is a non-starter, because Handke is more concerned with his representation than with his heroine's life. What is left is an obliquely entertaining account of his authorial researches. (Edith Clever, Bruno Ganz.) *Reviewed.*

LORD OF THE RINGS, THE (*United Artists*)

Ralph Bakshi's animated version (Part 1) of the Tolkien epic employs so many sophisticated techniques to make one forget it is animation that the result seems unhappily compromised live action. The ghouls and villains are effectively done; the hobbits rather wishy-washy and Disneyish; the theme has missed its time by about fifteen years.

MOVIE MOVIE (*ITC*)

A recreation of the cheap programmers of yesteryear, in which George C. Scott, Trish Van Devere, Eli Wallach and others act out an inspirational boxing melodrama and a backstage musical. Director Stanley Donen gets the balance of parody and pastiche right, but the script is heavy-handed. (Barbara Harris.) *Reviewed.*

MUPPET MOVIE, THE (*ITC*)

Pursued by a fast-food baron (a purveyor of frogburgers), the long-suffering Kermit collects the feuding members of the TV Muppet family while travelling to Hollywood for an audition with mogul Orson Welles. Despite the score of guest stars, that zestful feeling of music-hall turns teetering on the brink of disaster is sadly absent. (Charles Durning, Mel Brooks; director, James Frawley.)

RIDDLE OF THE SANDS, THE (*Rank*)

This polished-up version of Erskine Childers' yarn about the danger of Britain being invaded by a continental power juggles with caricatures of Edwardian 'Britishness' and lamentably fails to whip up enthusiasm for matters either nautical or tyrannical. (Michael York, Simon MacCorkindale, Jenny Agutter; director, Tony Maylam.)

SLOW DANCING IN THE BIG CITY (*United Artists*)

Warm-hearted New York-Jewish newspaper columnist falls in love with physically afflicted Canadian ballet dancer while also helping deprived child with a drugs problem. In other words, another slice of modern Hollywood mythology posing as social realism, notable for Anne Ditchburn's beauty and dancing skills, and for the unbelievable upbeat ending. (Paul Sorvino; director, John G. Avildsen.)

SWEET REVENGE (*CIC*)

This old-fashioned tale of a car thief (Stockard Channing), who finally accepts responsibility when a friend is killed trying to protect her from the law, is pointlessly padded out with disenchanted reflections on the legal profession and nostalgic asides about the 60s drop-out culture. (Sam Waterston; director, Jerry Schatzberg.)

THIEF OF BAGHDAD, THE (*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)

Lumpenfantasy in bargain basement sets. Script, direction and cast (with the honourable exceptions of Terence Stamp and Daniel Emilfork) reveal about as much imagination as a rice pudding. (Peter Ustinov, Roddy McDowall, Kabir Bedi; director, Clive Donner.)

TREE OF WOODEN CLOGS, THE (*Curzon*)

Olmi's lyrical and genuinely unadorned epic about the life of a peasant community in Lombardy at the close of the 19th century reaffirms the director's singular faith in the benevolence of God-given human nature. Education encroaches, changes will occur, but God endures. Stunningly photographed and edited by Olmi himself. (Luigi Ornaghi, Giuseppe Brignoli, Lucia Pezzoli.)

TURTLE ON ITS BACK (*Connoisseur*)

Luz Béraud's directorial début wittily takes on every stereotyped movie notion of literary endeavour. The author-hero suffers from a writer's block that leads him from domestic frustration to a frightening night-time odyssey (whose reverberations range from *Moby Dick* to *film noir*). A neat reflection in one language on the agonies of another. (Jean-François Stevenin, Bernadette Lafont, Claude Miller.)

WARRIOR, THE (*CIC*)

The weakest yet of writer-director Walter Hill's attempts to empty genre movies of psychological interest and deploy them as fantastical ritual. This yarn about a New York street gang, attempting to regain home base when all have turned against them, is vivid neither as action nor as some latterday Homeric epic. (Michael Beck, Deborah Van Valkenburgh.)

WATER BABIES, THE (*Pethurst*)

Rather charming adaptation of Kingsley's novel, with an excellent cast and surprisingly appealing animation for the underwater scenes, although the water babies themselves are in the well-worn tradition of Disney cuteness. (James Mason, Billie Whitelaw, Joan Greenwood; director, Lionel Jeffries.)

WIFEMISTRESS (*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)

Imitation Visconti, beautifully photographed by Ennio Guarnieri; but basically Women's Lib tushery as a husband, in hiding for political offences in turn-of-the-century Italy, discovers a new love for his neglected wife as she discovers her independence. (Marcello Mastroianni, Laura Antonelli; director, Marco Vicario.)

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